THE MAN FORBID

AND OTHER ESSAYS

JOHN DAVIDSON

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BY
JOHN DAVIDSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

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INTRODUCTION

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	7
The Man Forbid	21
Pre-Shakespearianism	33
Banderole's Æsthetic Bill	41
On Writing a Causerie	55
The Criticism of Poetry	65
Téte-a-Téte	75
A Spirit	89
Téte-a-Téte	99
A Would-be Londoner	109
The Art of Poetry	125
Thoughts on Irony	133
George Meredith's Odes	139
Evolution in Literature	151
Téte-a-Téte	155
Poetry and Criticism	163
Téte-a-Téte	169
Téte-a-Téte	183
Chanctonbury Ring	195
By-Ways	207
Prose Eclogue	219
On Interviewing	231
On the Downs	247

INTRODUCTION

JOHN DAVIDSON has given notable work to his generation as a poet, as a novelist, as an essayist, and as a critic. All his literary work comprehends a philosophy of life, and whether or not this philosophy be original or echoed, true or false, the fact remains that it has had a strongly marked, though not always clearly recognised, influence on English letters. If his views of life seem merely the result of mental indigestion brought on by an overdose of Nietszche, it is likewise true that his forceful expression gave to these views a more serious hearing by a larger audience than had hitherto been granted to most English followers of the Apostle of the *Uebermensch.*

By reason of his doctrines, the facts of his life are interesting, if only for the light they shed on the pathetic though not uncommon contrast between this man's dream and

his deed. For like many more before him he glimpsed the Grail, but only through a mist of error which he lacked the will to disperse. Yet inasmuch as he followed the quest long and faithfully, ere he succumbed to the final weakness, the chronicle of his days is ennobling, and though simple as far as outward happenings were concerned, shows much complexity in the literary product.

John Davidson was born at Barrhead, in Renfrewshire, Scotland, on the eleventh of April, 1857. His father, the Reverend Alexander Davidson, was a minister of the Evangelical Union. The boy's training was hardly academic in the true sense of the word, and was limited to what he was inclined to gather in The Highlanders' Academy in Greenock, where he acted as a sort of pupil-teacher, and in the course of a single session at the University of Edinburgh. Leaving college in 1877, he wrote his first play, now known as "An Unhistorical Pastoral," which, however, was not published until over ten years later. As a boy he had worked as an assistant in a chemical laboratory in Greenock, and later as assistant to the Town Analyst,

and the training which this occupation gave him was utilised to no little advantage in later days when he sought for an apt simile to convey his meaning. Upon leaving the University, he took refuge in teaching, and between 1877 and 1889 he gave instruction in numerous private and charity schools, devoting his leisure to poetic and dramatic composition. In 1890, he came up to London, and eked out a scanty subsistence by writing articles and reviews for the Glasgow Herald and the Speaker, until his poetry began to attract the attention of the literary public. For the next few years his career was that of the successful journalist who elevated his craft by the sheer energy of his effort to a position where it might probably be called inspired. The irony of his life was this. Potentially capable of leadership, he bowed to public opinion and followed the line of least resistance. The immediate success was possibly greater; the ultimate painful outcome is unhappily well-known to everyone. In the latter part of April, 1909, he suddenly disappeared, leaving behind him manuscripts which clearly revealed a suicidal purpose.

Several months later his body was discovered, and to-day the world mourns him as a talented genius whose will-power succumbed to despair.

To turn from John Davidson's life to his work is as if the reader's mind were suddenly to be plunged into an over-stimulating current of mental activity. The effect is pleasant, but it is a shock. No matter what the form of Davidson's expression may be, whether it be prose or poetry, essay or drama, we are brought face to face with a strongly combative intellect which does violence to our beliefs, and half convinces us by sheer force of epigram and paradox. What more shocking mental stimulant can be found than such an interrogation as this, which stands all by itself in "A Rosary." "Is not hope only a more subtle form of despair?" These arresting questions, or statements such as this, "Dignity *is* impudence," are invariably novel, and their appeal to the reader's intellectual pride is so subtly calculated as to take by storm the position which a more suave and ordered argument would leave intact. By reason of this and other characteristics, John

Davidson has succeeded in founding a school in contemporary English composition which may be briefly characterised as the apotheosis of journalism, and whose chief exponent today is Mr. Gilbert Chesterton. Even the casual reader will observe far more than a superficial resemblance, for example, between "The Napoleon of Notting Hill" or "The Club of Queer Trades," and John Davidson's less familiar, though by no means inferior, novels, "Perfervid" and "The Good Men." Nor is this resemblance confined to fiction. I think there is a very marked similarity in thought-processes, to say the least, between the critical essays of John Davidson, as they appeared week after week in the columns of "The Speaker," and the causeries and reviews by Gilbert Chesterton which appeared not long afterward in the same critical journal.

This type of creative work is neither healthy nor healthful. Think of Dr. Johnson turned Pierrot, and the *reductio ad absurdum* is complete and immediate. The pose is delightful,— indeed it is almost fully justified,— but it lacks enthusiasm. It is

not fresh and natural: it is forced and artificial. It takes different forms, you may say. True: but whether your would-be Dr. Johnson is a follower of Davidson or a follower of his master Nietszche, the net result is the same. For the external is all that is copied: the red blood of enthusiasm, though not the counterfeit fluid of force, is almost completely lost. The absurd public antics of Gerard de Nerval and other French symbolists, which Symons relates, and Gilbert Chesterton jumping in and out of hansom cabs, as related by himself, seem equally artificial. The truth of the matter is that the *fin-de-siêcle* pose is beginning to seem old-fashioned, and that this reaction from it is in danger of going to even more violent extremes. For this reason, it is important to know just what John Davidson, who holds the balance between the two, really stands for. If he had been the strong man, like Dr. Johnson, the study of his work would have been more valuable. As it is, he is the sole bridge that we have between the period of the *malade imaginaire,* and the Kipling period that followed. The two periods may

seem identical in point of date, but the fact remains, I think, that the so-called *fin-de-siêcle* era was experienced long before it was expressed, and that England suffered less from it than any other nation.

The contemporary man who is potentially strong but vacillatingly weak, if he have an original mind and a magnetic personality, is bound to suffer much in the conflict. To him both sides appear to have much of truth, and in endeavoring to live his life, he is torn between two ideals seemingly wide apart as the poles,— the one apparently symbolising death, and the other life. The suffering is born of delusion, for as a matter of fact, the two are one, and both are evil, since spiritual death for itself and bodily life and progress for itself are one and indivisible and false. Villiers de l'Isle Adam, the typical symbolist, informed his countrymen that his continued existence reminded him of the bored playgoer in the front seat of a proscenium box who sat through the play only out of courtesy for the feelings of his neighbors. Kipling, on the other hand, preaches the gospel of the

body. You cannot be an animal and live only out of politeness. It is a contradiction in terms.

Davidson sought the magnificent vision, and found it neither in Symons nor in Kipling. Being a child of his century, he turned to Nietszche. Though he repudiated evolution, and wrote a novel to attack its absurdities, as another has done after him, he found relief and inspiration for his thought and expression in the cymbals and sunrises of Zarathustra. Here, at last, he breathed a clearer, brighter air. In "Sentences and Paragraphs" he had written as follows: —

"The chief hindrances in the consideration of any matter are the thoughts of others. It is not so much a test of genius to think originally, as to know what one actually does think. Some men upon most subjects have two judgments: a public one for daily use, and a private one which they deceive themselves into the belief they never held. There are decent, honest men who opine the opinions of others, persuaded that they are their own; few indeed can detach their proper thought from the mass of ideas."

Realising this truth then, he turned, as I said, to Nietszche. He was fortunately too clear-sighted to follow his master absolutely. As the ostrich buries its head in the sand, so Nietszche buries his nose in the upper air, and refuses to look at the slime in which his feet are dabbling, conscious only of a pleasant, titillating coolness. Let us be primitive, but let our minds be clear, says Davidson, and he looks at the misery beneath him, and forgets the blue sky above. Both are wrong, but both mean well, for Nietszche and Davidson are alike striving. Both endeavour to pull the human race up with them, but Davidson is content to lift them, earth and all, to his own level, while Nietszche pulls men up by the roots, and pelts them at the stars for playthings. Davidson plays with his and other men's souls: with Nietszche mankind, including himself, is only a toy for the firmament.

I have emphasised this distinction so strongly for a special purpose, wishing to bring out the fact that Davidson was in no sense an imitator. He saw his own individual vision, and if it was an Inferno, so much

the greater was his courage in voicing it. He saw it in terms of poetry, and he expressed it nobly, for the sense of beauty was ever uppermost. He had the lyric mind, and it was his misfortune to be a Scotsman. Metaphysic has killed more minds than it has ever cured, and the Scotsman is ever prone to disputation. That is one reason why Dr. Johnson detested Scotsmen. He considered them too individualistic. That is the reason why Scotsmen, apart from the immortal Boswell who was surely no true Scot, detest Dr. Johnson, and why John Davidson detested the literary and ethical standards of his day. For this reason, and this reason only, he precipitated a strong reaction in poetry and prose, which, together with the anvil-blows of a young Indian journalist, saved English literature from being annexed to France.

Is it not well to sound a note of warning? The intellectual earth nowadays is flat, and contemporary England, in running away from a monster that is dead, may fall over the bounding precipice of the land of common-sense. Shaw and Chesterton are a portent. Their method is defensible: their con-

viction seems open to question. Yet their influence is great,— almost overmastering. John Bull would do well to look to his other island before it is too late, for there, and there only, lies the fresh spirit of romantic beauty which can save English letters from itself.

The present collection of essays may be looked upon as a sequel to "Sentences and Paragraphs." Gathered in the same manner, from the dusty files of a forgotten periodical, they have their significance as an emphatic statement of some of John Davidson's most individual and stimulating views. This interest should have been sufficient to have ensured their preservation, and it is the editor's excuse, if such be necessary, for his undertaking.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

January 24th, 1910.

THE MAN FORBID

THE MAN FORBID

THE long undulating seaward slope of the cliffless Downs is always, in clear weather, an unsatisfying prospect. The face of the Downs, starved, discontented, and unkempt, lowers gloomily on the sea under rain; in the sunshine, a pale, bleak radiance plays over it, as of a land hoping against hope. The cliffless Downs, that is. Where the white escarpment towers along the beach, the seaboard has a different personality; more engaging contours, greener turf, a lofty attitude, a splendid place immediately surmounting the tides. The precipice gives strength and dignity; the slow, serpentine declivity creeping to an undistinguished shore is as dispiriting as a string of blind beggars. But in the evening the low-lying

Downs seem to rise from their supine posture; cloaked in the dusk they beckon and whisper, and you go to meet them again.

Strange sounds, strange beings appear upon the Downs in the gloaming, if you have the ears to hear, the sight to see. There and then the Itinerant met the Hermit, The Man Forbid, who neither hopes nor fears, nor hates nor loves. Where he lives none can tell. Sometimes he haunts the desert, sometimes the snow-clad mountains. The Itinerant met him on the Downs. The day had been dull and wet, but towards sunset the clouds broke up a little and the rain ceased. Above the sea, slanting like a ledge of dark jade, hung a purple haze rimming the horizon. Above the haze disordered brands smouldered darkly. The depth and intensity of the crimson fire filled and possessed the mind; it was difficult to see the overhanging leaden cloud, or to note the golden background of the fire, the fainter yellow, the pale green. Away from the west, cross-hatched

vapour flushed rosy red and quickly faded into pencil marks. Behind Cissbury Ring an immense rampart of steel-blue cloud rose menacingly. In the north the shadow of night already loomed. As the Itinerant watched the passage of time from the verge of Erringham Valley, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a face peered into his, the face of The Man Forbid.

"I know who you are," said the Itinerant at once. "What do you want with me?"

"I come to warn you!"

"To warn me?"

"Yes. That is my only touch with humanity: I would have others avoid my fate."

"What is your fate?"

"I shall tell you. I became so close a comrade of the day and the night and the time of the year, so submissive a lover and student of men and women, that I forgot all I had ever learnt from books. Then it seemed to me that I stood erect for the

first time; and I looked with compassion on the multitude beside me, bent double under toppling libraries. I noted that the heavier his load of libraries, and the more prone his attitude, the happier the porter seemed to be. I saw vast hordes of people engaged in tilling the soil, and in many other occupations, the majority of whom, whenever they could snatch an interval of leisure, spent it in grovelling under heavy burdens of printed matter, which, if they had none of their own, they would beg, borrow, or steal. 'Good people,' I cried earnestly, 'throw off your burdens and stand erect. Few are they who are helped by books.'"

"I agree with you there," said the Itinerant; "I have never learnt anything from books. One only gets out of books what one brings to them: that is to say, literature, so far as it affects the individual, is only a confirmation of his experience."

The Man Forbid resumed his discourse without heeding the Itinerant's interrup-

tion. "'Few are they who are helped by books. Will you die, then, crushed under libraries? The printing-press works without ceasing; already your spines are curved by the weight of the literature of thirty centuries. Throw it all off; stand up; and see the world for yourselves — day and night, and life and death. Do not think the things someone has said of these; but keep watching them, and you will become excellent, for we are what we contemplate!' But they mocked me and told me the story of the fox who lost his tail. I replied with the story of the monkey, who also lost his tail — in order to become a man! I said to them, 'Break with the past. All that men have imagined, thought and felt — art, philosophy, and religion; all that is only a spiritual tail which must be got rid of if your souls are to develop.' But they laughed me to scorn and pelted me away with pamphlets and tomes. Then I ceased to concern myself with the world of men, and fixed my mind on Nature.

Darkness and light, colour and sound, and life and death filled me with their unsayable meaning. Again I turned to my brethren, straining under piled-up libraries. I could not refrain from the attempt to express my thought. Not being a musician I was unfortunately unable to employ pure sound. Language, so much more dense a medium than music, refracted my meaning sadly, although I chose my words well. Nevertheless some of the book-porters seemed to understand my songs, and for a short season pronounced them beautiful and true. Only for a time, however; because their minds were so preoccupied with the load of libraries that they quickly tired of anything else; and once more resented bitterly the suggestion that they were wasting their time and strength in supporting the accumulated thought of thirty centuries. There was no harbour for me among men. I left them, and gradually man and his fate became indifferent to me. Then also Nature, day and night,

and life and death, ceased to interest me — me, a feeble inhabitant of one of the most insignificant spheres among myriads of myriads that roll in space. The whole substantial universe, systems and suns, and life conscious and unconscious, appeared to me only the momentary and impertinent irruption of a shining, sounding spectre into the empty, dark, and silent infinite. And all this — nay, I shall leave you with a smile — all this because I had cut my spiritual tail off. The orang-outang, I suppose, sat his tail off in the course of many centuries. At any rate, you will not make a monkey human by caudatomy. Nor will you make men divine by cutting them off at the root. It was a false analogy, that of the tail. Man grows out of the past; his tap-roots descend, drawing nourishment from every stratum, and are warmed by the central fire. The scission of the smallest rootlet will hurt his growth. It is not underground that he must tend his development, but in the sunlight, and with the

winds and the dew. I have warned you. My heart is a husk; my brain a mere mirror. Men shrink from me. I am indifferent, and feel neither joy nor grief; but since men loathe me, I know that they would not be as I am. You keep too much alone; you wander about on the Downs. Day and night, life and death, engage your thought, enthral your fancy. The ideas with which men have filled and adorned their environment, the ideas which they perceive to be there, are distasteful to you. You would break entirely with the past. But I warn you, I warn you. Resort to the knife, and you will find that it is not an unbecoming and useless tail you sever with manful stroke, but spiritual suicide that you commit."

The Man Forbid vanished as suddenly as he came; and the Itinerant pulled himself together. Had he thought of using the knife? He would consider the matter in his study. Meantime night was thronging into the sky. Behind him the Downs had

receded and sunk low. Beneath, the Norman tower stood up shadowy, a ghostly dead grey against the darkening sea. The blue slate roofs, the red tiles, the red and yellow chimneys of the town, appeared and disappeared in the gloaming, dim flashes of colour among the black groups of leafless trees in the churchyard and the gardens. The soft white plume of a train, with ruddy under-feathers glowing in the furnace fire, wheeled through the swarthy branches. Two lamps were lit in a narrow back street. Not a breath of wind stirred. The sunset, burning slowly, smouldered out above the sea; and the opposing lamps, golden-hued, took heart in the night. The smoke from a thousand fires curled into the air; good people were at supper; and the sound of a song rose faintly.

PRE-SHAKESPEARIANISM

PRE-SHAKESPEARIANISM

NOW is "a voice of wailing heard and loud lament"; our young men see visions and dream dreams. All the woe of the world is to be uttered at last. Poetry has been democratised. Nothing could prevent that. The songs are of the highways and the by-ways. The city slums and the deserted villages are haunted by sorrowful figures, men of power and endurance, feeding their melancholy not with heroic fable, the beauty of the moon, and the studious cloisters, but with the actual sight of the misery in which so many millions live. To this mood the vaunted sweetness and light of the ineffective apostle of culture are like a faded rose in a charnel-house, a flash of moonshine on the Dead Sea. It is not now to the light that "the

passionate heart of the poet" will turn. In vain the old man cried: —

Authors — essayist, atheist, novelist, realist,
rhymester, play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of nature with the
living hues of art.
Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own
foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence
— forward — naked — let them stare.

This ironical Balaam-curse has become a message. It must all out. The poet is in the street, the hospital. He intends the world to know that it is out of joint. He will not let it alone. With whatever trumpet or jew's-harp he can command he will clang and buzz at its ear, disturbing its sleep, its pleasures; discoursing of darkness and of the terror that walks by night. "Down with Reticence" — that kills the patient; "down with Reverence" — for whatever has become abominable. Do they delight in this? No; it is only that it is

inevitable. Democracy is here; and we have to go through with it.

The newspaper is one of the most potent factors in moulding the character of contemporary poetry. Perhaps it was first of all the newspaper that couched the eyes of poetry. Burns's eyes were open. Blake's also for a time; and Wordsworth had profound insight into the true character of man and of the world; but all the rest saw men as trees walking; Tennyson and Browning are Shakespearian. The prismatic cloud that Shakespeare hung out between poets and the world! It was the newspapers, I think, that brought us round to what may be called an order of Pre-Shakespearianism. It was out of the newspapers that Thomas Hood got "The Song of the Shirt" — in its place the most important English poem of the nineteenth century; the "woman in unwomanly rags plying her needle and thread" is the type of the world's misery. "The Song of the Shirt" is the most terrible poem in the

English language. Only a high heart and strong brain broken on the wheel of life, but master of its own pain and anguish, able to jest in the jaws of death, could have sung this song, of which every single stanza wrings the heart. Poetry passed by on the other side. It could not endure the woman in unwomanly rags. It hid its head like the fabled ostrich in some sand-bed of Arthurian legend, or took shelter in the paradoxical optimism of "The Ring and the Book." It is true William Morris stood by her when the priest and the Levite passed by. He stood by her side, he helped her; but he hardly saw her, nor could he show her as she is. "Mother and Son," his greatest poem, and a very great poem, is a vision of a deserted Titaness in London streets; there was a veil also between him and the world, although in another sense, with his elemental Sigurds, he is the truest of all Pre-Shakespearians. But the woman in unwomanly rags, and all the insanity and iniquity of which she is the type, will now

be sung. Poetry will concern itself with her and hers for some time to come. The offal of the world is being said in statistics, in prose fiction: it is besides going to be sung. James Thomson sang it; and others are doing so. Will it be of any avail? We cannot tell. Nothing that has been done avails. Poor-laws, charity organisations, dexterously hold the wound open, or tenderly and hopelessly skin over the cancer. But there it is in the streets, the hospitals, the poor-houses, the prisons; it is a flood that surges about our feet, it rises breast-high. And it will be sung in all keys and voices. Poetry has other functions, other aims; but this also has become its province.

BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL

BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL

"YOU'RE gloomy, Banderole."

"I always am in March."

"How's that?"

"Because in March I mourn for my Æsthetic Bill."

"Your Æsthetic Bill?"

"Yes, have you never heard of it?"

"Never. Tell me about it, Banderole."

"Shall I? Well, I suppose I may. But I must premise. Look at me, Magsworth. If you were to characterise me, you would say that I am a man of a passable appearance, with — ah — a certain undignified frankness — shall we call it? — and a pleasant voice. Come, now, we've known each other for about a week; and that's your opinion, isn't it? Well-spoken, well-looking, carelessly frank — and shrewd withal?"

"Yes; I may think that you are perhaps a little partial to yourself; but that's about my opinion."

"Quite so. That is the opinion I have of myself; that is the opinion all my new acquaintances form of me; but it is not the opinion of my old friends; and in six months it will cease to be yours if you continue knowing me."

"I shall continue knowing you if for no other reason than to test the truth of what you say."

"Very well. It was not until I was forty that I discovered what my intimates thought of me. Until my fortieth year, the good-natured, undemonstrative deference with which those who knew me best treated me appeared to me a tribute to my shrewdness. I use the word 'shrewdness' now; six years ago I should have employed some such phrase as 'great talents,' 'indisputable capacity,' or 'remarkable gifts'; but I have had a lesson."

"Lessons *are* learnt occasionally even in

these days, when people are afraid to acknowledge that they were ever taken in — even by themselves."

"Quite true. One day, *à propos* of something I had said, an acquaintance exclaimed, 'You can't mean that! It's not in keeping with the transparent simplicity of your character.' I forget what it was I had said, but that remark about myself was a revelation to me. I went home with it, and sat down and thought it out. Clearly my intimates considered me a merely ingenuous person; brusque people took the edge off their manners in dealing with me, not because they feared me, but because they looked upon me as a child; and the wind was tempered for me generally. It was a painful process, I can tell you, having my eyes couched of the self-complacent belief that others thought me a thorough man of the world. Then for awhile I liked my being misunderstood. To have the reputation of a simpleton and to be a Machiavelli is to enjoy a position of great

power; and I went about for weeks revelling in a perfect analysis of the motives of all my acquaintances — I saw how they wanted to protect me, to aid me, to save me; I had only to ask for a thing to have it; everybody wished to be able to say, 'I, too, did something for that dear fellow Banderole.' I tired of that, however, and determined at last to appear in my true colours; but it was a most hopeless undertaking."

"It has been said that there is nothing more difficult to live down than a good reputation."

"And well said; I found it so. When I did anything in the *rôle* of Machiavelli, people took it as a joke, and it was decided that my simplicity of character grew daily more transparent. It was to no purpose that I said the bitterest things about all my friends; they simply quoted them to each other as Banderole's latest, and agreed that none but a man of the most ingenuous nature could have detected and character-

ised their faults and foibles so unerringly. I despaired of ever appearing as I really am in the ordinary walks of life; so after much cogitation I hit upon a distinctly original idea. Did you ever have a distinctly original idea?"

"I'm not sure."

"Well, if you ever have one, you will enjoy it, at first; and then you will be in an agony till you make up your mind what to do with it. One's first penny in one's first breeches' pocket is an icicle compared to one's first original idea. There are so many things you can do with an original idea. You may exemplify it in your life —"

"And get run in."

"You may put it into a magazine article —"

"And be snubbed for a plagiarist. You may imbed it in a play, or bury it in three volumes; you may paint it, or carve it, or sing it; and nobody will look at it or listen to it."

"You understand the matter. But if you put it into a Bill and get it passed, why, there you are for ever and ever with the British Constitution. So I drew up a Bill incorporating my original idea. By that Bill I expected at one stride to step upon a pedestal and exhibit once for all that breadth and subtlety which, as long as I was only one man more in the street, escaped the observation of even those who knew me best."

"But you were never in Parliament?"

"No; but the Marquis of Wagstaff's son promised to get his father to introduce the Bill into the House of Lords. You see, it was really a sort of sumptuary Bill, and the Lords was the proper place for it, I was told. I called it a 'Bill for the Beautifying of Britain,' or, briefly, an 'Æsthetic Bill.'"

"Umph! Go on!"

"The Bill arranged for externals only."

"Right. If the outside of the platter be

clean, it follows that the inside will also be clean."

"I am glad you think so. It was my opinion. I have found that the best shops make the finest show, in spite of proverbs to the contrary. I made no attempt to be comprehensive, believing that, if in one or two vast concerns an æsthetic reformation were effected, the details would practically work out themselves. I began with railways. My Bill provided that railways should be bordered all their length by gardens, and so become, as it were, rivers of flowers flowing across and along the whole land. The lines themselves were to be made of steel, damascened with arabesques in brass and silver. The stations were all to be castles, kiosks, pavilions, with drawing-rooms, dining-rooms, smoking-rooms, upholstered artistically. I worked out a new type of carriage superior to anything that has ever been seen before; and I introduced a clause requiring all electricians,

under a heavy penalty, to labour at the development of electro-motion. I made it penal to advertise in railway stations; but that was covered by a general clause forbidding all mural and open-air advertisement. It seems to be so simple. Stop advertising, and nobody would be a penny the worse. On the contrary, a great many people would be infinitely better in temper and digestion, for you would reduce measurably the worry of competition."

"And what about those whose occupations would be gone — advertising agents and bill-stickers?"

"My dear Magsworth, my Æsthetic Bill provided occupation for more people than are ever likely to want work. Consider the immense army of gardeners required for the railway borders, of skilled craftsmen to keep my damascened lines in order. In everything I touched I provided work — artistic work for thousands."

"Yes; but about this advertising. There are many miles of dead wall in suburban

lines that would be even more sombre and depressing were it not for the enamel and colour of wines, perfumery, etc."

"I would have the bill-stickers taught fresco-painting — they can already wield a brush; and they should then cover these walls with designs and pictures."

"And the economy of it? How, for example, would your railways pay?"

"The simplest thing in the world. The Government would, of course, take them all over; there would be only one class and one fare — a penny; you would stick a stamp in your hat and go anywhere — from Charing Cross to Westminster or Wick. What would be the result of such an arrangement? Why, Britain would practically reside on its railways; and you would have on every line, not a constant succession of trains, but one long unbroken train, going and coming, all day, all night. And the income — I've worked it out. Suppose twenty million people travelled a day — and I consider that below the aver-

age — you would have, at a penny a head, considerably over £30,000,000 per annum; but at least two-thirds of the passengers would return the same day, which would give you a gross income of £50,000,000."

"Figures like these speak for themselves. And how did you get on with Lord Wagstaff?"

"Well, when I had the Bill drafted, I read it to Wagstaff's son. He was in a hurry at the time, but promised to tell his father about it. I offered to send him a copy, but he said he must speak about it first. Next week he went off for a two-years' tour round the world, and I don't believe he said a word to his father, for I wrote the Marquis three times, and received no reply. It was in March I drew up my Bill. I have never had such a time of pleasurable excitement since — hence my gloom."

"And you never got on the pedestal?"

"No. Yet I expounded my bill to all my friends. It is my unfortunate reputa-

tion as a merely ingenuous person that stands in the way. I have overheard people, after the most eloquent exposition, saying, 'Sweet soul, Banderole,' 'Delightful creature,' 'So simple and confiding.' Now, Magsworth, honestly, tell me your opinion of my Bill."

"I really haven't time. I have to go — I'm afraid I'm off on a two-years' tour round the world."

ON WRITING A CAUSERIE

ON WRITING A CAUSERIE

I SUPPOSE I am at liberty to tell the reader that this is my first causerie. Every reviewer thinks he can write a causerie, and doubtless that is why the editor has asked me to try my hand; it is at least a new experience to be held up as a warning to other would-be causeurs. Doubtless some people are born terrible examples, some achieve the distinction, and some, like me, have it thrust upon them. It is satisfactory to know that the more egregiously I fail, the greater ought to be the benefit to others. Yet nothing, I am afraid, will warn aspiring reviewers; like other contributors they are "all in a manner fierce," and it is so easy to say "*I* could have done better."

What would you do if you were asked to

fire off a causerie, your first causerie, at an hour's notice?

It is said that Horace Vernet, painting some battle or other, caused a constant fire of muskets to be kept up in his *atelier*, and worked amid the noise and smoke until the picture was finished. Why, of course, then, when you are asked for a literary causerie point-blank, you will load your table with books you like and dip into them here and there until the pure literary mood flushes your nerves and the fluent sentences come. And with the sentences a subject, and here it is: The Books that have a Literary Effect.

Not all good literature has invariably a literary effect. One of the best of our living poets finds that his Muse takes wing whenever he reads Milton. On the other hand, a novelist of some standing screws his courage to the writing mood by a careful perusal of the advertisements of houses, etc., in a morning paper. Here, indeed, the law of contraries may seem to apply;

and yet, though Carlyle prepared himself for the task of rewriting the first volume of his "History of the French Revolution" by a three weeks' debauch of Marryat's novels, Goethe sought inspiration for his *Iphigénie* in a careful copying of Winckelmann's drawings of Greek sculpture.

Literary biography, caressing one with the triumphs of others, is a sweet incentive. To read of the easy success of Scott always gives the novelist confidence. Here is Lockhart's "Life," the most enchanting, if not the greatest of English biographies. I think I can always write after looking over a page or two of Lockhart; but I will not betray myself to the Philistines by reading any of it just now. Only, I must quote one passage. This is the first opportunity I have ever had of doing so: it is really an opportunity; I did not mention Scott in the interests of the quotation. The best piece of writing in Lockhart's "Life," after some passages by Scott him-

self, is, in my opinion, Mr. Adolphus's account of his visit to Abbotsford, and the best thing in Mr. Adolphus's account is his description of Scott's laugh. Having portrayed Scott's face, with a particular stress on his eyes, Mr. Adolphus goes on to say —

Occasionally, when he spoke of something very audacious or eccentric, they would dilate and light up with a tragi-comic, hare-brained expression quite peculiar to himself; one might see in it a whole chapter of "Cœur-de-Lion" and the Clerk of Copmanhurst. Never, perhaps, did a man go through all the gradations of laughter with such complete enjoyment and a countenance so radiant. The first dawn of a humorous thought would show itself sometimes, as he sat silent, by an involuntary lengthening of the upper lip, followed by a shy, sidelong glance at his neighbours, indescribably whimsical, and seeming to ask from their looks whether the spark of drollery should be suppressed or allowed to blaze out. In the full tide of mirth he did indeed "laugh the

heart's laugh," like Walpole; but it was not boisterous and overpowering, nor did it check the course of his words; he could go on telling or descanting while his lungs did "crow like chanticleer," *his syllables, in the struggle, growing more emphatic, his accent more strongly Scotch, and his voice plaintive with excess of merriment.*

This is surely the most wonderful description of a laugh. There is that very crow in Shakespeare referred to by Mr. Adolphus, and there is also that exquisite Shakespearean, "he will laugh you till his face is like a wet cloth ill laid up," and there is Carlyle's description of Teufelsdröckh's laugh, but in none of these is the conception, gestation, and birth of the dimpled, rosy offspring of a great man's good-humour traced with such loving art and such perfect science as in this immortal paragraph of Mr. Adolphus's.

Perhaps, however, writers, when not in the vein, are rather coaxed and soothed to their work by some minor writer that

they love than spurred to it by emulation of the greatest men of letters. Hazlitt is such a source of inspiration. No one has a greater indifference to what has been said before than he. He is, as strikingly as Byron, the creature of his own will. He raises or lowers his subject to himself. "He exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy." One can be as strained, as petulant as one likes — one can say anything, after a page of Hazlitt. No, not anything; not if you know his essay on Byron. That pulls a man up. Hazlitt, in a very fine frenzy, had been calling Byron names; he had even thought very little of "our author's turn for satire," and had "written thus far," when news came of Byron's death. Immediately Hazlitt recognized the peevish strain of his invective; he had not known that he had been writing Byron's epitaph. Then follows a very splendid passage: "Death cancels everything but truth, and strips a man of everything but genius and virtue. It is a sort of natural

canonisation. It makes the meanest of us sacred; it instals the poet in his immortality; and lifts him to the skies. We consign the least worthy qualities to oblivion, and cherish the nobler and imperishable nature with double pride and fondness." Hazlitt was a great man.

Here I have written something which is neither essay nor review, and which — need not therefore be a causerie! I see a subject, nibble about it a little, and then go off and lug out, as if it were a new discovery, a famous old quotation that everybody knows. Then I make another dash at the subject, and — take refuge in another quotation. It is at least, I hope, one way of writing a causerie, although I have mentioned only two out of twenty books I laid on my table.

The unmethodical way, let us call it. Want of faculty, when rightly considered, is really a kind of faculty. If one really possesses a talent for doing things the wrong way, the power of putting the cart

before the horse with infallible exactitude, and an irresistible tendency towards the employment of that figure which grammarians call hysteron-proteron, one may be said to have a gift.

Still, it is well to be modest: this may not be a causerie, after all. It is true — as Isabey said — that to paint a picture is not a question of drinking the sea: "It is simply a matter of taking a few of the colours on my palette and spreading them upon a piece of canvas." But Isabey said also to another painter, "Decidedly you were born to be a surgeon. Your vocation dominates you: you wish to paint a boat and you paint a tumour."

Many men always sneer at themselves when they have done their best.

THE CRITICISM OF POETRY

THE CRITICISM OF POETRY

ANYONE who has ever trusted himself knows that knowledge is in the air; and that in brooding, in loafing, in living, knowledge is absorbed by the pores of the body. The eyes and the ears are the main thoroughfares of knowledge, but there are many by-ways intractable to sight and hearing, devious and erratic in supposition, but as marked and inevitable as the seemingly wanton paths of fish in the river or of birds in the air. The body, the whole body, is also the soul. It is the nerves, the heart, the liver, the germs of life that apprehend and think and feel. The seat of memory is probably in the muscles. The brain is only a register and sifter — at the highest an alembic. Imagination gathers the flower of the whole anatomy. It is in this that the poet differs from the thinker,

with whom it is the habit at present to confound him. A thinker is one who has permitted his brain, the chief servant of his soul, to get the upper hand, just as the epicure gives the reins of power to his palate. In the poet the whole assembly of his being is harmonious; no organ is master; a diapason extends throughout the entire scale; his whole body, his whole soul is rapt into the making of his poetry. Every poet is a new experiment; all poetry is empirical. And this is simply saying over again that there is such a thing as poetry, and that poets are born into the world; but as poets and poetry are rare, it may be no disservice, remembering that such a thing as a "boom in poets" has been talked of, to remind the running reader that the poet is the most exceptional of men.

How is poetry to be recognised? Literary criticism has a comparative method, the employment of a foot-rule or tape-line obtained by the study of accepted poetry, a method not altogether to be despised. It

is, of course, the only possible method of dealing with the huge body of imitative verse; but it does not commend itself to me in the criticism of actual poetry except as a most subsidiary aid. Poetry is the product of originality, of a first-hand experience and observation of life, of a direct communion with men and women, with the seasons of the year, with day and night. The critic will therefore be well advised, if he have the good fortune to find something that seems to him poetry, to lay it out in the daylight and the moonlight, to take it into the street and the fields, to set against it his own experience and observation of life, and, should he be a poet himself, to remember how it was that he wrote his own poetry. In this way I reduce culture, which is only experience at second-hand, to its proper place as the merest handmaid of criticism.

It seems to me that Mr. Victor J. Daley's "At Dawn and Dusk" deserves, in some measure, this actual criticism. The influ-

ence of Mr. Swinburne is apparent in "Years Ago," of Poe in the series called "Fragments," and of other poets in his ballads and sonnets. But "In a Wine Cellar" is an authentic Australian poem by an Australian poet: —

No vintage alien
For thee or me!
Our fount Castalian
Of poesy
Shall wine Australian,
None other be. . . .

It has no glamour
Of old romance,
Of war or amour
In Spain or France;
Its poets stammer
As yet, perchance;

But he may wholly
Become a seer
Who quaffs it slowly;
For he shall hear,
Though faintly, lowly,
Yet sweet and clear,

The axes ringing
On mountain sides,
The wool-boats swinging
Down Darling tides,
The drovers singing
Where Clancy rides,

The miners driving,
The stockman's strife;
All sounds conniving
To tell the rife,
Rich, rude, strong-striving
Australian life.

Once more your hand in
This hand of mine!
And while we stand in
The brave sunshine,
Pledge deep our land in
Our land's own wine!

This is new and free. In "The Poet Care," there is the same freshness, the same novelty.

Care is a poet fine:
He works in shade or shine,

And leaves — you know his sign! —
No day without its line.

He writes with iron pen
Upon the brows of men;
Faint lines at first, and then
He scores them in again.

Then deeper script appears:
The furrows of dim fears,
The traces of old tears,
The tide-marks of the years.

To him, with sight made strong
By suffering and wrong,
The brows of all the throng
Are eloquent with song.

It is not to the purpose to say that this has been said and sung before. It is here sung newly, at first-hand, by a poet living at this present day in the fifth continent of the world. Adam and Eve said it to each other when they began to grow old. But it is all to say over again; it is the mission of the poet to state the world

afresh. The critic of words and phrases will find much to except in Mr. Daley's poetry, although some of his workmanship is excellent, especially in his more conventional pieces: "The River Maiden," and "His Mate" are particularly fine. But academic questions of rhyme, rhythm, and diction have little more to do with poetry than epaulettes and pipeclay have to do with strategy. Poetry is not always an army on parade; sometimes it is an army coming back from the wars, epaulettes and pipe-clay all gone, shoeless, ragged, wounded, starved, but with victory on its brows.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Cosmo Mortimer. *Ninian Jamieson.*

NINIAN JAMIESON. Among your many theories, have you a theory of poetry, Cosmo?

Cosmo Mortimer. I have! I have a theory of poetry. Poetry is that which had better not be expressed; silence being impossible, poetry endeavours to atone its betrayal of secrets by beauty of utterance. It is a question, however, if perfect form is a sufficient excuse for lyric poetry. It would be difficult to defend the direct expression of passion and emotion, and its publication by one man for others to read. For my own part all lyric poetry, "The Battle of the Baltic," or a sonnet of Shakespeare's, Shelley's "Cloud" or a love-song of Burns, holds me shamefast.

I read such things furtively, and slip the book under a cushion and swear at the poodle if I'm dropped on.

N. J. Then you'll have small regard for the poetry of women.

C. M. I can't endure it. But of course you know I think women constitutionally inferior to men.

N. J. But intellectually?

C. M. Yes, of course; intellectually women have far and away the best of it. Since the world began, their intellects have been unintentionally trained at all hazards. The result is that they can neither think nor feel. They have not been allowed to eat and drink as much as men, to use their limbs with the freedom of men, to see all sides of life, to take an unrestricted share in the work of the world, to wander, to loaf, to disregard conventions; their muscles, their nerves, their blood, and their vital organs, the seats of thought and emotion, are in a state of hebetation compared with those of men. But their intellects —

by intellect I mean brain, you understand — their intellects are developed so disproportionately as to constitute the one portent in the world. It is the intellect of woman unprovided with proper food and exercise of personal experience which has built up Society as unconsciously as the coral insect makes continents; blindly, ruthlessly, with an hourly sacrifice pitched into the streets of a percentage of the healthiest womanhood. Woman rules the world; the thirty million wretched males, drilled and batoned into utter cowardice. in order that they may submit to be shot down at long range in cold blood, have their monstrous being solely that women may reign and be supported in ever-growing comfort or luxury by the remaining males.

N. J. It is a helpful point of view, Cosmo; no doubt of it. But you are very discursive. We began with a theory of poetry; and I started the subject because I am curious to know what you think of

this. It is from a poem called "Motherhood" in a volume entitled "In This Our World" * by a poet of the name of Stetson.

C. M. Stetson? Don't know him.

N. J. American. Now:—

Motherhood: seeing with her clear kind eyes,
Luminous, tender eyes, wherein the smile
Is like the smile of sunlight on the sea,
That the new children of the newer day
Need more than any single heart can give,
More than is known to any single mind,
More than is found in any single house,
And need it from the day they see the light.
Then, measuring her love by what they need,
Gives from the heart of modern motherhood.
Gives first, as tree to bear God's highest fruit,
A clean, strong body, perfect and full grown,
Fair for the purpose of its womanhood,
Not for light fancy of a lower mind:
Gives a clear mind, athletic, beautiful,
Dispassionate, unswerving from the truth;

* Small, Maynard & Co., Boston. G. P. Putnam's Sons, London.

Gives a great heart that throbs with human
love,
As she would wish her son to love the world.
Then, when the child comes lovely as a star,
She, in the peace of primal motherhood,
Nurses her baby with unceasing joy,
With milk of human kindness, human health,
Bright human beauty, and immortal love.
And then? Ah! here is the New Mother-
hood —
The motherhood of the fair new-made
world —
O glorious New Mother of New Men!

What do you think of it?

C. M. Well, the verse itself is not interesting; but the matter is good didactic stuff of its kind. Clearly the work of a manly fellow.

N. J. This writer's rhymed verse is better, I admit. Stetson has distinct gifts of irony. In "An Obstacle" a "hulking prejudice sat all across the road," immovable by entreaty, passion, invective, until at last —

I took my hat, I took my stick,
My load I settled fair,
I approached that awful incubus
With an absent-minded air —
And I walked directly through him,
As if he wasn't there.

That's good; and so is this "A Brood Mare" — a healthy, broad horse-laugh: —

I had a quarrel yesterday,
A violent dispute,
With a man who tried to sell to me
A strange, amorphous brute. . .

Said I, "Do you pretend to say
You can raise colts as fair
From that cripple as you can
From an able-bodied mare?"

Quoth he, "I solemnly assert,
Just as I said before,
A mare that's good for breeding
Can be good for nothing more."

Cried I, "One thing is certain proof;
One thing I want to see;

Trot out the noble colts you raise
From your anomaly."

He looked a little dashed at this,
And the poor mare hung her head,
"Fact is," said he, "She's had but one;
And that one — well, it's dead!"

C. M. A passable stable joke with a crude application to the coddling of women.

N. J. If poetry is, as you assert, that which had better not be expressed, how does that rank?

C. M. No class, my dear sir! It is exactly what must be expressed, and considered until the eyelids ache. Here is a man in earnest, as no woman can ever be; he uses any weapon that comes to hand, hit or miss, poetry or doggerel. Note that a woman would never do that; she would lose the battle searching for an agate for her catapult, while the man was slinging mud and macadam all the time.

N. J. Ha! Well; listen to this: —

The female fox she is a fox;
The female whale a whale;
The female eagle holds her place
As representative of race
As truly as the male. . . .
One female in the world we find
Telling a different tale.
It is the female of our race
Who holds a parasitic place,
Dependent on the male. . . .
The race is higher than the sex,
Though sex be fair and good;
A human creature is your state,
And to be human is more great
Than even womanhood!

C. M. I understand Mr. Stetson now; I see what he is driving at. The fight between the sexes which, with the help of Christianity, ended in the triumph of the female, and the establishment of marriage, the family and home, he wishes to see renewed. He would have women dethroned and brought down into the arena to compete with men — not some women, but all

women. Probably he is right; it is the tendency of things at present. But before women elect to fight they should know that they have everything to lose; and once they abdicate, they can never possibly attain again to the high position they have held for several centuries. In the arena they would be beaten; and would immediately begin again, however unconsciously, to build upon their sex, not upon their humanity — accepting Mr. Stetson's distinction — a latter, inferior empire of marriage, family, and home; it is the nature of the female to nidify. Her intellect, functioning as instinct, leads her infallibly to dominion; but the moment she employs intellect consciously as intellect, society will dissolve; man will once more become a hunter; woman, a captive breeder and beast of burden.

N. J. But you said just now that the intellect of woman constitutes the one portent in the world.

C. M. So it does; because she is becom-

ing conscious of it. She begins to know that her brain is, to start with, a more subtle and powerful organ than man's; further, she feels that it has been developed to prodigious form and pliancy by thousands of years of intrigue, chicanery, stratagem in securing against all the individual interests of the male a soft nest for herself and her young. "Now," she says, "now; I shall have my own again! This slow brain, this dull procreating brute of a man shall be put in his place at last. He shall know that I have been his conqueror all the time." That will precipitate the sexual fight in its elemental form; and then it is the big, hard chest able to endure a battering-ram that wins in the long run, brain or no brain.

N. J. Let me read you another verse: —

For the sake of my child I must hasten to save
All the children on earth from the jail and the grave.

For so, and so only, I lighten the share
Of the pain of the world that my darling must
bear.

You see: this American poet is a woman — Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

C. M. There you are! She makes me think she is a man! Women are orchids; there is no end of their deceptive appearances.

A SPIRIT

A SPIRIT

MR. YEATS uses the wind as a symbol of desires and hopes: "Wind and spirit and vague desire have been associated everywhere." His poems, in "The Wind among the Reeds," are like the breath of a spirit, a keen and exquisite song.

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
  Enwrought with gold and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
  Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
  But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
  Tread softly because you tread on my
    dreams.

Tread softly, because it is not a mortal dream that the winds awaken. It is difficult to believe that Mr. Yeats has not

been dead for many years, and now revisits the glimpses of the moon, the first traveller to return from the undiscovered country. He has at least been with the Sidhe, the people of the Faery Hills, whose realm is not to be frequented with impunity if one would retain an interest in ordinary things. Although free of their company, Mr. Yeats has not yet lost human sympathies, as the delightful "Fiddler of Dooney," will tell: —

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
  Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
  My brother in Maharabuiee.

I pass my brother and cousin:
  They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
  I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come, at the end of time,
  To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
  But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With "Here is the fiddler of Dooney!
And dance like a wave of the sea.

Even here, however, the human sympathy is three parts tolerance; Mr. Yeats's heart in this volume "goes out" most fully to a time "when the stars" shall "be blown about the sky like the sparks blown out of a smithy."

It is the recurrent burden —

While time and the world are ebbing
away
In twilight of dew and of fire.

The wind cries in the sedge to the wandering Aedh:

Until the axle break
That keeps the stars in their round,

> And hands hurl in the deep
> The banner of east and west,
> And the girdle of light is unbound,
> Your head will not lie on the breast
> Of your beloved in sleep.

And in the meantime the Sidhe call, and come between the poet and the world of men and women. In their company he has attained a knowledge and insight into the way and beings of the twilight, unseconded in our time. By reason of this he is an original poet of note. It is the Sidhe that point out to him:

> Old men playing at cards
> *With a twinkling of ancient hands,*

and that tell him how to describe "pearl-pale" fingers and "dove-grey" seaboards. His song is, indeed, like the voice of a disembodied spirit. Secrets are known to him. He has a passport for the debatable land between the living and the dead; its marches are his daily walk; and his conversation is with Caolte, who was a flaming

man, with Niam, the beautiful woman who led Oisin to the Country of the Young, and with his own creatures, Aedh, Hanrahan, and Michael Robartes, who are to him "principles of the mind," rather "than actual personages." With these are his walk and conversation, and with the living seers of Ireland; for it is all actual, and his first-hand acquaintance with the extant faery lore of his country quickens his whole treatment of fairy mythology. Such a passage as the following in Mr. Yeats's copious notes brings the reader face to face with the subject in the flesh and in the spirit. "I once," says Mr. Yeats, in his own person,

"stood beside a man in Ireland when he saw it (the Tree of Life) growing there in a vision, that seemed to have rapt him out of the body. He saw the Garden of Eden walled about, and on the top of a high mountain, as in certain mediæval diagrams; and after passing the Tree of Knowledge, on which grew fruit full of troubled faces, and

through whose branches flowed, he was told, sap that was human souls, he came on a tall dark tree with little bitter fruits, and was shown a kind of stair or ladder going up through the tree, and told to go up; and near the top of the tree a beautiful woman, like the Goddess of Life associated with the tree in Assyria, gave him a rose that seemed to have been growing upon the tree."

In another note Mr. Yeats writes:

"A faery doctor has told me that his wife 'got the touch' at her marriage because there was one of them (the Sidhe) wanted her; and the way he knew for certain was, that when he took a pitchfork out of the rafters, and told her it was a broom, she said, 'It is a broom.' She was, the truth is, in the magical sleep, to which people have given a new name lately, that makes the imagination so passive that it can be moulded by any voice in any world into any shape."

These passages, without the poems, would show that Mr. Yeats is no mere antiquarian; that he is not actuated by a tame

literary interest in faery lore. They show that he has a living and intellectual regard for what is to most only a faded mythology, and that he is of an individuality rare at any time, rarest in ours.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Parolles. *Hamlet.*

PAROLLES. I have desired much to meet you, my lord, in this limbo where we now are. It has been my life-long habit to frequent the company of my betters; and — Oh no! my lord! you must not give me the go-by. Nor could you: I stick like a burr. If you will not talk with me now, you may come to do so in some more relaxed mood, when your loquacity — for you are as talkative as I am — might lead you to say more than your memory would delight to recall as a no-secret shared with so ill a counsellor.

Ham. You are of the same forge and bellows as myself — that world within the world which Shakespeare made. I will talk with you now.

Par. It is of this world of Shakespeare's making that I would talk.

Ham. Sometimes I think it is the only world. Shakespeare found the world an empty nut and put a kernel into it.

Par. Maybe; but human intelligence has eaten and digested that kernel at last, and the shell yawns for a new lining. Shakespeare, my lord, has been found out. It is I who am Shakespeare, not you. As I said three hundred years ago,

> Who knows himself a braggart,
> Let him fear this; for it will come to pass
> That every braggart shall be found an ass.

I have come into my own again, my lord. Hitherto, Shakespearian has meant simply Hamletian. The good-natured world — for the actual world is at the last and in the gross exceedingly thoughtless and agreeable — I say, my lord, the good-natured world, highly flattered at its supposed reflection, dressed its mind in the magic mirror of Hamlet, and fancied itself Shakes-

pearian. But Hamlet and Prospero are only the vanity of Shakespeare. I, Parolles, am the true Shakespeare; and I can prove it.

Ham. It is possible to prove anything by circumstantial evidence. Go on; I consented to talk with you.

Par. I am the true Shakespeare; because, with the exception of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, who is liker Shakespeare than any other of his creations saving myself, I am the only really live character in all his plays. Falstaff, Richard, Juliet, Iago, Nym, yourself, my lord, are merely fairies, good, bad, or indifferent. Mark you, my lord, mark it well: I do not imply that Shakespeare intended me for himself. I am the sub-consciousness, the inmost fibre of the man — the Judas of very self, which every artist unbeknown creates for his own betrayal. This men begin to recognise; and the moment they are fully aware of the self-deception of their Hamleto-Shakespearianism the em-

pire of Shakespeare is destroyed, and the world becomes once more an empty nut.

Ham. And you come into your own again, *videlicet*, nonentity.

Par. No, my lord; I alone remain, the self-pilloried monster, the Judas-Shakespeare who cozened the foolish world for three hundred years.

Ham. Were we not spirits, and although I should be unclean afterwards until the evening, I would beat your face into a jelly with my hands.

Par. Oh! my lord, we know you can unpack your heart like a drab, and say more than you dare do. That I am Shakespeare is made apparent to any awakened intelligence by the fact that what was subconscious as Parolles becomes conscious as a palliated, a self-excused characteristic of Hamlet, the mirror, the false, the magic mirror which Shakespeare held up to nature. But my main proof, my impregnable rock, is the book of sonnets. And here, my lord, is a new edition (I buy

them all: it is *my* book) a very good one, too: published by Mr. John Lane, of the Bodley Head, my lord, in the Albany. The book, I am impelled to point out by some hidden power, connected, doubtless, with my recrudescence, introduces a new illustrator, Mr. Henry Ospovat, a Muscovite, to the English public. It was an original idea to illustrate Shakespeare's sonnets, and a very questionable one, I think; hardly answered in the affirmative by Mr. Ospovat's pictures.

Ham. Let me see them. Mr. Ospovat's art is of Rossettian origin, I should say. His pictures are interesting in themselves: some of the faces are unmistakable types. As comments on the text they are suggestive; there is subtlety in the painted beauty allowing the sonnet, which has caught fire at the candle lighting her mirror, to flare away in smoky flame as she reads it. I like these illustrations; and it may be that it is just such works as Shakespeare's sonnets that should be illus-

trated rather than dramas and stories containing pictures in themselves. It is, however, still a question with me whether or not one art is prostituted in illustrating another.

Par. The old doubter, still! Well, my lord, these sonnets are the evidence in chief for my identity with Shakespeare. In them I have written myself down infamous in the last degree: the hack and slave of Southampton and Pembroke; the go-between for courtiers and their mistresses; a fatuous fool; a debased sensualist; and — You have broken my jaw, my lord. Was it well done to strike one who cannot strike back by reason of his inferior rank? How the devil did I suddenly become embodied! I thought we were spirits! Ugh! I've swallowed a tooth!

Ham. You shall now go to your place in limbo and read this book from beginning to end, "The Mystery of Shakespeare's Sonnets," an attempted elucidation by Mr. Cuming Walters. It will help you,

perhaps, to understand that Shakespeare was greater than either you or I; that you, by many degrees inferior to the average sensual man, are less alive than almost any other character Shakespeare portrayed, lacking, as you do, both conscience and imagination. Beside you Pistol is beautiful and Bardolph sweet. What have you to do with the faults of Shakespeare? Who is there at all that shall judge him? It is law all the world over that men must be judged by their peers. Where are those who may sit with Shakespeare? Dante, Goethe, Hugo, Ibsen, are parochial beside him. Cæsar, Charlemagne, Cromwell, Napoleon, are of a different order. Read Mr. Walters' book. He will clear your mind of the loathsome cant with which some men in the street have befogged Shakespeare for themselves. Respect the interesting elucidation Mr. Walters offers. I believe there is much truth in it. I myself am likest Shakespeare of all the beings he made. Those tables on which I scrib-

bled against the wall of Elsinore that one may smile and smile and be a villain, are perhaps, the very tables on which Shakespeare wrote his sonnets. So extraordinary a being would keep an extraordinary commonplace book. His sonnets are memoranda, written principally for himself, and although some of the matter is reproduced in the plays, the meaning of much of it can only be guessed at. The persons of the sonnets are the symbols of a poetic shorthand of which the key perished with Shakespeare himself. Mr. Walters makes as fine a guess as may be. But whether you accept it or not, never again read into the sonnets a loathsome meaning.

Par. Well, my lord, well. But I can tell you this, that Shakespeare's day is done. There is an end of him.

Ham. If so, then, the end is not to come; if it be not to come it will be now; if it be not now yet it will come: the readiness is all. Shakespeare has been ready for the better part of three centuries. I question if Time is ready yet.

A WOULD-BE LONDONER

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SANDRIDGE came to London too late for what he wished to accomplish. His ambition was to be a Londoner. It is true the Londoner is made, not born; but at the very latest the process must begin at twenty-five. Sandridge was two-and-thirty when he left a North of England town, a circle of interesting acquaintances of which he was the centre, and a roomy old-fashioned house of his own, for London, solitude, and a modest apartment near Oxford Circus.

In the provincial bosom, faith, even at thirty-two, meditates metropolitan miracles; Sandridge expected to have the London mountains removed by a member of Parliament who was his second-cousin.

"Ah," said the Member; "you must begin to learn the ropes at a club."

Needing for himself all the influence he could snatch, he resented Sandridge's unconnected state, and refused him a single bone. That is the use of the fable of "knowing the ropes"; nobody believes in it; but it is very convenient to refer to when you are asked for assistance.

"It's a shame," grumbled the Member. "A man's relatives ought to be able to help him instead of requiring help." So he put up his cousin at an expensive new club.

"Let him find out the ropes there if he can," he snarled to an acquaintance.

"As well there as anywhere, when you think of it, though," he continued, reconsidering. "Have you found out the ropes? Has anyone ever found out the ropes? No; there's no rigging about it. It's simply a huge tumbling coil of hemp and iron, all tarred with the same stick; and you get hold of a hawser-end or a chain-cable, and hang on or drop off."

In the smoking-room of the new club,

Sandridge made diffident remarks about the young Disraeli, the young Bulwer, about Count D'Orsay, about great talkers, about personalities who had been powerful outside of politics, literature, and art: these were the Londoners he had talked of with such confidence in the North. He and his friends had discussed their waistcoats, their eloquence, their repartees, their influence on fashions of dress, fashions of speech, fashions of thought.

In a month's time Sandridge's diffidence changed into taciturnity. The younger clubmen chaffed him, and called him "the Disraelian Johnny." He withdrew into corners and moped in anterooms. One afternoon Lieutenant Hopeby of the Purple Guards lounged in beside him: he was a very exquisite giant, twenty-three years old, guileless, as certain about everything as a child of seven, and his forte was patronage; he felt himself an amateur Providence, and was always on the look-out for somebody to console. It was he, and

Sandridge knew it, who had struck out the phrase, "the Disraelian Johnny"; but it was also he, and he only, who had given any real attention to Sandridge's remarks.

"Well, old chap," began Hopeby, in his paternal way. "Let's have a comfortable talk. How do you get on? Do you find yourself becoming a regular Londoner?"

Sandridge blushed to the roots of his hair; but he was quite powerless. He thought, writhing mentally, how Disraeli would have touched this youngster with a point of flame able to drill a passage even through his armour-plating of conceit; whereas he hadn't a leaden dart to throw.

"I am afraid," he stammered, "I am too old. Art is long and life is short, you know."

"But you mustn't say that," replied the Purple Guard kindly. "Look at — what's his name? — the old Roman who began to learn Greek on his death-bed. It's never too late to learn, as the penitent

thief said. But what's your difficulty, Sandridge?"

"Nobody ever asks me anywhere; I never have a chance to —"

"To what? Come, old chap."

"Well," said Sandridge, shifting uneasily in his chair, "it's not like me to talk in this way — ah — Hopeby; but I seldom have a chance to talk to anybody now. I'm awfully ambitious"— he could have bitten his tongue off at every word. "You've heard my idea of the Londoner, his place and power. My intention is to be a Londoner of that kind. I have educated myself for such a position by the study of — by many studies; just as one is educated to take orders — or for the army. But I get no opportunity to — to exercise my functions."

"Hard on you — eh? But I say, you know, you're quite an original, Sandridge. It's a new branch; deportment's nothing to this. You should have a professorship,

my boy; teach them to be Londoners. I saw an article in a paper the other day — 'Wanted, a New Occupation.' Here you have it: 'The Art of Being a Londoner, in twenty lessons.' You could charge what you like; and you'd get it — for a time."

"But I'm demoralised," rejoined Sandridge, overlooking Hopeby's banter. "The fellows here don't understand me."

Then he added very slowly, measuring his words, that sometimes faltered, and with eyes that flickered between confidence and timidity: "I take it that I have not yet met a foeman worthy of my steel. At a dinner of celebrities I believe I could at once make my mark."

The Purple Guard sat up and stared at Sandridge for fully a minute.

"Yes," continued Sandridge, misunderstanding the other's silence, and feeling, to his own surprise, as secure as a man who has led the ace of trumps for the last trick; "yes, Hopeby, my place is in those

circles where conversation is understood. Here every man is full of himself and his own little affairs. They talk of the club *cuisine*, of their regiment, of an actress, or of a billiard-player: a thought, an epigram, only makes them raise their eyebrows. I feel among you like an eagle in a dovecot."

The Purple Guard sat back and watched Sandridge through his eyelashes.

"Conversation is like piano-playing," went on the would-be Londoner, "and is not truly valued except by virtuosos. Most of you fellows, now, would as soon hear a piano-organ as Paderewski. I have practised talking; we used to practise it for hours daily in the North — the genial initiative, the sudden digression, the calculated repartee, the retort in ambush, the fitted apologue, the grooved anecdote, the cascade of words, the slow sententious movement, the intolerant harangue; we had an art and practice of talk with a terminology all our own. Yes, Hopeby, I have

it in me to make a great name as a conversationalist."

The Purple Guard sat up again. His surprise was over. It took this young man a very short time to docket and dismiss any revelation of character.

"You're one of the queerest chaps I ever met, Sandridge," he said; "and I'll tell you what I'll do for you. You know my uncle, the Pope?"

"Your uncle, the Pope?"

"I see you don't. Major Hopeby-Bonner, my uncle, is one of the best talkers in London, or has that reputation, which is better. Somebody of consequence whom he snubbed called him the Pope, and the name stuck. Now, he's dining here with me to-night. You come too, and the pair of you can talk for a wager."

Sandridge accepted in a faint voice. He wished that it had been anybody but Major Hopeby-Bonner's nephew who had asked him, because he would have preferred to decline the invitation. He and his

friends had discussed the Major: his novels, poems and essays had all been declared inferior, the work of a callow amateur. Rumours of his gifts as a talker had also reached the North, and it had been decided that he was a mere *farceur*, on a level with the jester of antiquity. Sandridge had imagined himself brushing off like flies such people as Major Hopeby-Bonner; to be asked to meet him as a man of the first importance blew the foundation-stone out of his aërial castle. But he quickly built another one; told himself it would be practice: went to his room, drank tea, and dipped into Lives of Carlyle, Beaconsfield, Macaulay, and Houghton till dinner-time.

The Purple Guard introduced Sandridge to his uncle as "a talking chap, too." Sandridge, perspiring, wondered what Carlyle would have done in such a circumstance.

Major Hopeby-Bonner, like most garrulous people, was a reticent, bashful man, who plunged into speech because silence

was accompanied with the discomfort of greater self-consciousness.

"Talk," said the Major, "is diluted silence. I confess I could never carry more than a thimbleful of neat silence in an evening."

"The idea," rejoined Sandridge, very white, and in an unsteady voice, but wishing to say something strong at once, "is — ah — hardly — is not — quite — It might have been phrased differently." He was thinking that Beaconsfield would never have said anything so vulgar.

"It might," assented the Major, much amused. "How would you phrase it?"

"Well, I would have said," stammered Sandridge, "that — you remember, Carlyle —. Really I think there is nothing to beat the proverb 'Silence is golden.'"

"A good proverb. But what is the connection?"

"The connection? — Eh — we were talking of silence. At least I think so."

The Major smiled and went on with his

soup, and the Purple Guard said half aside to Sandridge: "Bravo! that must be 'the retort in ambush'— eh? You've floored him; he hasn't a word to say, you see." He added, "What do you think of London, Sandridge?"

"It's — very big," stammered Sandridge, "and enormous crowds, and buses, and — I understand the fogs are dreadful." He had no idea of what he was saying: he was going over in his mind the sentences that had passed between himself and the Major, trying to improve, or explain away, his own ineptitude.

"Ah! 'the slow sententious movement,'" murmured the Purple Guard.

"I have been in London half my life," said the Major; "and yet the mere speaking of the word 'London,' the overhearing it said casually, often thrills me with a sense of terror, and wonder, and delight."

"Mesopotamia," trolled the Purple Guard.

Sandridge, still several remarks behind

time, struck in: "The connection, Major Hopeby-Bonner, between what you said about silence and what I said is perhaps at first sight not very evident; but—" There he paused, and for the life of him could not resume his sentence.

"We're waiting for 'the sudden digression,'" said the Guardsman; and the Major smiled encouragingly. But it was all over with Sandridge; he went hot and cold, turned ghastly pale, pleaded illness, and withdrew.

That was his last appearance in a club or any haunt of men for a long time. He ceased all correspondence with his old friends; he hid away his biographies and books of table-talk; took all his food in his own room; walked about the streets at night muttering to himself; grew grey and bent; and was watched by the police. One autumn evening, feeling that actual madness beset him in his solitude, he slipped into the Café Cosmopolite. The band had just ceased playing a selection from *Il*

Trovatore as he entered the dining-room, and the crowd was somewhat subdued. Many noticed Sandridge, and were moved by his appearance. His furtive life had given him a stealthy, gliding motion. His grizzled hair, which he wore long, had gone off his forehead, and showed a high brow; his beard was also long and wizard-like. His slender, stooping figure, pale face, and deep-set, haunted eyes interested some spectators, and made others uneasy. He felt the impression he created, and was gratified. Next night he returned, and soon formed a habit of dining at the Café Cosmopolite every evening. He enters, a cold, self-centred figure, with wolfish, wandering eyes, like those of one who had been racked; and glides to his chosen seat. Women catch their breath as he passes, and all who see him for the first time ask who he is. Some think him like a picture of Christ; others, like Mephistopheles. The waiters know nothing of him; but tell country visitors that he is this, that, or the

other celebrity, according to fancy. He must be served in silence; points out on the card and on the wine-list what he requires, and eats ravenously. He is never heard to utter a word except "Go away!" if, as sometimes happens, a waiter forgets and addresses him.

He is the type of failure, and a legend begins to grow round him. His ambition was paltry, but he pursued it highly. Defeated in his effort to be first, he refused any other place; and it is this element of greatness in his character which makes him now so impressive an apparition in the Café Cosmopolite.

THE ART OF POETRY

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LIBERTY of utterance, spontaneity, is the mark of the highest poetry. To be spontaneous is the whole art of poetry, and especially distinguishes it from the artifice of poetry. It is therefore the main object of artifice to appear spontaneous. The master-artificer of our time, more skilled than Pope, accomplished beyond praise, never attained greater liberty of utterance than in the serenade in *Maud:* —

She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat
Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

The master-artist of all time was never more at ease than in the overture to *Twelfth Night:* —

> O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou!
> That, notwithstanding thy capacity
> Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,
> Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
> But falls into abatement and low price,
> Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy,
> That it alone is high-fantastical.

There is no prompt effect in the blank verse to equal the quadruple knock of the artificer's rhyme; Shakespeare's careless fault, the rhyme "there"—"soe'er," is worse than Tennyson's repeated subjunctive "were it"; but nothing in the blank verse requires such a resolute countenance or puts so much constraint on the imagination as Tennyson's conclusion, "purple and red." It appears, then, that the carelessness of the artist is unconsciously simulated by the artificer, the exigent form the

instinct of the latter selects entailing difficulties that make faults. Poetry is the most empirical of all the arts; in a sense every poet is a charlatan; he can give no authority except his own experience, his own imagination; in the last resort he can give no authority at all; he cannot tell: it was the Muse. Whether he be artificer or artist, and the true poet is always both, it is liberty of utterance he seeks. Poetry is the least artificial of all the arts; it is at its best when it is most archaic. This is not a matter of obsolete words; rather it is an eschewing of libraries, a getting back to the earth divested, saving the harp and sword, of all the inventions of man's hands and mind. Thus the freest utterance is always to be found in the narrative or the drama. Subconsciousness, which the poet singing in his own character inevitably obscures — that is to say, the eternal, the voice of the species — becomes audible in personation. The Elizabethan-Jacobean age, the great period of the drama, is also

the great period of poetry, when every aid to free and full utterance was employed in the disdain of art. It was in *The Spanish Tragedy* that Kyd revealed the new and excellent way of the madman. Here was liberty at last; everything could be said; and the kernel of the world appear through the rent in the heart, the crack in the mind. Hieronimo announces the woe of the awakened intelligence trembling on the verge of madness in three lines, three crude lines that are not surpassed by any piercing utterance of Hamlet, Timon, or Lear: —

> This toils my body, this consumeth age,
> That only I to all men just must be;
> And neither gods nor men be just to me.

It is a cry wrung from the inmost heart. These words do not occur in the additional matter; they are Kyd's, and they are the cognisance of Elizabethan tragedy.

In his quaint, erudite, and most readable preface (to the Temple edition), Professor Schick says of the play itself: "It is like

an enchanted garden, where lifeless wooden puppets seem to wait for the magician who is to wake them into life. We know that the magician did come, and of old Jeronimo he made Hamlet and Lear, out of Horatio and Bellimperia he made the loveliest of all wooing-scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*, of the play within the play he made the most subtle awakener of conscience." . . . Kyd's fate has been that of most pioneers. The crops of others wave on the land he cleared. But it would be easy to revive and perpetuate his memory. *The Spanish Tragedy* was so seminal in its own time, and, above all, was so influential in determining the character of some of Shakespeare's greatest work, that its regular publication as an appendix in popular editions of Shakespeare would be much more to the purpose than the inclusion of *Edward III.*, for example. Meantime, we have Mr. Dent's admirable "Temple Edition," which I hope will be widely read. Professor Schick's "wooden puppets" is

extreme. Hieronimo, although only the outline of a character, is made by Kyd the mouthpiece of his own actual woe, and the "Painter's part," the interpolation whose fame eclipsed that of the play itself, and which might have been hurriedly written by Shakespeare, will arrest and hold the most careless reader.

THOUGHTS ON IRONY

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I

BEHIND phenomena I have found an inexorable irony. Phenomena themselves are often beautiful; but perhaps they are only accidentally connected with spiritual truth, skin-deep, the complexion of this irony. I may ultimately find that irony includes beauty, and is greater than beauty. If poetry, aided by science, should find that truth is ugly, poetry will say so; but, as nothing is ugly to science, perhaps poetry may learn a lesson.

II

Worshipful Irony, the profound "Irony of fate," is doubtless responsible for Renanism, and all 'isms, but is derived from none of them.

It is centric, the adamantine axis of the universe. At its poles are the illusions we call matter and spirit, day and night, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness. By it our enterprises are whirled away from our most resolved intentions. A playwright, wearing out his life in the abortive effort to found a county family, makes the literature of the world Shakespearian centuries after his death; the Pilgrim Fathers colonise America in the name of the Highest — that Tammany may flourish in New York; and out of the beautiful Shakespearianism may come evil; out of Tammany, good.

Irony is the enigma within the enigma, the open secret, the only answer vouchsafed the eternal riddle.

III

I am not a Mocker; Mockery and Irony are not synonyms, as I understand them. It is true I called love "a mere broker for posterity;" but the image is homely, illuminative, and without disdain. The

advent of the Kingdom of Heaven was once likened to the approach of a thief in the night.

My concern is not exclusively with "the best, the noblest, and the happiest of men," but with the universe as I can grasp it. Irony is not a creed. The makers of creeds have always miscalled, denied some part of the world. Irony affirms and delights in the whole. Consciously, it is the deep complacence which contemplates with unalloyed satisfaction Love and Hate, the tiger and the nightingale, the horse and the blow-fly, Messalina and Galahad, the village natural and Napoleon. Unconsciously, it is the soul of the Universe. Steep Irony in Chaos, and the universe will string itself about it like crystals on a thread. Whence comes Chaos? Whence comes Irony? There is no reply. To believe that the universe was *made* is the essence of anthropomorphism. I would have no more interest in a made universe than in an eight-day clock or a suburban

villa. Thought cannot conceive, nor fancy call by any name, the manner and agency of the becoming of the universe. But I perceive the universe as a golden bough of Irony, flowering with suns and systems.

GEORGE MEREDITH'S ODES

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IT is as easy to find fault with the manner of Mr. Meredith's poetry as with the manner of Shakespeare's, or with that of any authentic writer, and there are those who hasten to do so. Mr. Meredith has of course always enjoyed the approbation of his peers and the reverential suffrage of his younger contemporaries, but the class which is attracted by the literariness of literature, second-hand minds whose thoughts are echoes, who have memory without judgment, and who, when they themselves attempt literature, "draw from a model," are now, and have been for long, so loud in the daily and weekly press, that a great poet like Mr. Meredith cannot find in contemporary criticism the mirror the poet needs, and is compelled, in his own

words, "to look elsewhere." Censorship is that function of criticism which mediocrity most affects. By finding fault it endeavours after a feeling of equality with that which is above it, unaware that admiration is the only and, happily, the generous means by which the lesser nature can reach the level of the greater.

I see a pitman, somewhat ragged as to his attire, who has laboured all day underground, trudging home and humming a tune by the way. A snob, on horseback perhaps, or in a brougham, on a bike, or on foot and ragged too, looks after him and cries out, "I say, my man! Look here! There's a hole in your coat!" That represents much of the criticism of the day — contemptible in quality, important by its prodigious volume. The writers of it are unable to connect criticism with understanding. Not to understand, but to stand over what is offered and insult grossly, seems to them in all good faith the natural thing to do. Decent

honest people, whose vision is a *cul-de-sac* ending in a blank wall, and with whom detraction is a merit, have doubtless always existed in large numbers, have muttered their comments upon occasion, and served the purpose of the ages in some occult but necessary manner. "Now," a vehement writer says, "a free press has endowed ineptitude and dulness with most unnecessary power and prominence, and made of them an actual portent. They are everywhere; they creep into the best periodicals; no editor can cope with them. At one time the ranks of the enemies of literature were recruited from its own outcasts, poets and novelists of ambition who had failed; but the native black rat has been eaten out or hunted into the lowest sewers by the hordes of vigorous brown rats, writers, namely, more or less successful, to whom literature is only a trade, and writers whose reviewing is their only connection with literature. To have an opinion, or to profess an opinion and be

able to state it, is all the qualification required — the vast increase in the space devoted to books in the periodical press provides the opportunity. I suppose there is no one who can put two sentences together who has not written a review and been paid for it. There are shillings, guineas to be had, weekly, monthly — pin-money, pocket-money. The result is that the word 'literature' has become nauseous in the ears of the world; that an authentic manner is considered affectation, and whatever cannot be read at break-neck speed is passed over as obscure." There is probably much truth in the remarks of this vigorous writer. Certain it is that, whereas music, art and the drama are more or less handsomely served by responsible critics, poetry and fiction remain pretty much the prey of anonymity.

"Mr. Meredith is a poet: we admit that this man is a poet; but what is he doing? Why, he is making poetry! The man is actually singing! We can't stand that!"

Here you have the essential objection taken to all true poetry, to all true things. If you can seem to be busy about a matter, like a bishop, for example, or a high priest, you are applauded of all men; but if you are actually doing it, like the tinker of Bedford or the Wayfarer of Galilee, you are not by any means applauded of all men. Or the cry may be, "Yes, Mr. Meredith is a poet; but his principal work is in fiction: he is only a minor poet." This is the unconscious jealousy of men which cannot tolerate that one person should have two reputations. And as for his being a minor poet, why, all contemporary poetry is minor poetry. Not until it has been loaded with the thought and emotion of generations of readers can poetry be said to be of age. It is the centuries that give poetry its majority.

I now wish to illustrate, as far as can be done by extracts, the power and splendour of Mr. Meredith's "Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History."

From the third ode I make no quotation, as it is a reprint. In the first, "The Revolution," is the following description of France risen against tyrants,—

"War's ragged pupils; many a wavering line,
Torn from the dear fat soil of champaigns hopefully tilled,
Torn from the motherly bowl, the homely spoon,
To jest at famine, ply
The novel scythe, and stand to it on the field;
Lie in the furrows, rain-clouds for their tents;
Fronting the red artillery straighten spine;
Buckle the shiver at sight of comrades strewn;
Over an empty platter affect the merrily filled;
Die, if the multiple hazards around said die;
Downward measure a foeman mightily sized;
Laugh at the legs that would run for a life despised;
Lyrical on into death's red-roaring jaw-gape, steeled
Gaily to take of the foe his lesson, and give reply.
Cheerful apprentices, they shall be masters soon!"

This of France mated with Napoleon, "the man-miracle," "earth's chosen, crowned, unchallengeable upstart," "the arbiter of circumstance," is from the second ode,—

"Nor ever had heroical Romance,
Never ensanguined History's lengthened scroll
Shown fulminant to shoot the leven-dart
Terrific as this man, by whom upraised,
Aggrandised and begemmed she outstripped her peers;
Like midnight's levying brazier-beacon blazed
Defiant to the world, a rally for her sons;
Day of the darkness; this man's mate; by him,
Cannon his name,
Rescued from vivisectionist and knave,
Her body's dominators and her shame;
By him with rivers of ranked battalions, brave
Past mortal girt: a march of swords and guns
Incessant; his proved warriors; loaded dice
He flung on the crested board, where chilly Fears

Behold the Reaper's ground, Death sitting grim,
Awatch for his predestined ones
Mid shrieks and torrent-hooves; but these,
Inebriate of his inevitable device,
Hail it their hero's wood of lustrous laurel-trees
Blossom and print of fresh Hesperides,
The boiling life-blood in their cheers."

In the last ode, "Alsace Lorraine," Mr. George Meredith, the foremost man of letters in England, utters a high and noble message to France and to all men, the old message of renunciation with a new bravery in it: —

"As light enkindles light when heavenly earthly mates,
The flame of pure immits the flame of pure,
Magnanimous magnanimous creates.
So to majestic beauty stricken rears
Hard-visaged rock against the risen glow;
And men are in the secret with the spheres,
Whose glory is celestially to bestow.
Now nation looks to nation, that may live

Their common nurseling, like the torrent's
flower,
Shaken by foul Destruction's fast-piled heap.
On France is laid the proud initiative
Of sacrifice in one self-mastering hour,
Whereby more than her lost one will she reap;
Perchance the very lost again regain,
To count it less than her superb reward.
Our Europe, where is debtor each to each,
Pass measure of excess, and war is Cain,
Fraternal from the Seaman's beach,
From answering Rhine in grand accord,
From Neva beneath Northern cloud,
And from our Transatlantic Europe loud,
Will hail the rare example for their theme;
Give response, as rich foliage to the breeze;
In their intrusted nurseling know them one;
Like a brave vessel under press of steam,
Abreast the winds and tides, on angry seas,
Plucked by the heavens forlorn of present
sun,
Will drive through darkness, and, with faith
supreme,
Have sight of haven and the crowded quays."

Mr. Meredith's "Odes in Contribution

to the Song of French History," is, in some respects, the most important book that has been given to the world for many years. It offers the heart of England to the heart of France; it takes a proud step forward in the internationalisation of literature; and it contains the first profound notes of the new epic — the epic of Democracy with Napoleon for hero.

EVOLUTION IN LITERATURE

EVOLUTION IN LITERATURE

THE evolutionary idea is a misleading one in literature even more than in science and philosophy. Since the Ptolemaic system, nothing more satisfactory to common sense has been offered in any branch of knowledge than evolution; but it is now supposed that the sun does not go round the earth, and it may very well be that the apparent descent of man is a sense-illusion also. It is known that oak trees do not grow from pine-cones, although an oak and a pine may stand side by side. It is known that monkeys never beget men although they frequent the same regions. Because Victorian literature succeeds Georgian literature, and, at an interval, that of the first James, this epoch of letters is not necessarily

related to those as child and great-great-great-grandchild. I suggest that English literature is a forest rather than a plantation; a land of upheavals and disarranged strata that science can make little of yet, at least; and a place of meteorites of which the earth can tell nothing. I suggest that evolution, reversing the proverb, cannot see the trees for the wood; and that generalisation, most helpful in dealing with classes, is mischievous applied to individuals. I suggest that intelligence — poet, thinker, sinner, authentic person, or whatever the fortunate-unfortunate may be called — will accept no creed; that although evolution is bound to rule the minds of men for hundreds of years to come, intelligence knows it will be dismissed, as the idea of creation is being dismissed now; and that intelligence, although compelled sometimes to use the evolutionary idea in order to be comprehended by contemporaries, is unfettered by that idea.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

James Boswell. *Dr. Johnson.*

JAMES BOSWELL. How, sir, would you define Poetry?

Dr. Johnson. Poetry is the entertainment of the imagination by æsthetic inventions in language.

J. B. Does that definition not apply as well to prose?

Dr. J. It does in a limited measure; but poetry, alone in verbal art, excites the imagination to the highest pitch and satisfies the æsthetic desire it arouses.

J. B. Is it possible to state how poetry does this?

Dr. J. Yes, sir. The restraint upon prose is one of common sense; whereas the restraint upon poetry is that of rhythm.

J. B. Rhyme, sir?

Dr. J. You talk like a fool, sir. Rhyme is not essential to poetry. It is the restraint of rhythm which is the source of the pleasure poetry gives. The difference between prose and poetry is the difference between walking and dancing. The former is an exercise, or a means of transit from one point to another; and having got into the way the walker has nothing to do but follow his nose at whatever pace and length of stride he chooses or utility requires. The latter, as it happens, exercises the dancer; but the purpose of the dancer is to take and give delight, and in all his gyrations, sallies, twists and turns, poses, steps and pirouettes, he is obedient to the strictest law of rhythm.

J. B. But, sir, Kemp, the Elizabethan actor, danced all the way from London to Norwich, which was surely a transit from one point to another.

Dr. J. Sir, your illustration is imper-

tinent. It was the Morris that Kemp danced, with bells at his ankles; in itself a comic performance related to dancing, as Hood's punning ballads are related to poetry; and, as Kemp reiterated and prolonged it in his notorious itinerary, a perversion of function more ridiculous than it would be to reprint "Faithless Nelly Gray" over and over in a score of volumes of the bulk of the Encyclopædia Britannica.

J. B. Two anachronisms, sir! You live long before the Encyclopædia Britannica and Thomas Hood.

Dr. J. They are nothing, sir, to the anachronisms I expect to commit in the course of this conversation.

J. B. To resume, sir. Rhythm is not confined to poetry. Let me quote a passage from Sir Thomas Browne:—

> Pyramids, arches, obelisks, were but the irregularities of vain-glory, and wild enormities of ancient magnanimity. But the most magnanimous resolution rests in the Christian

religion, which trampleth upon pride, and sits on the neck of ambition, humbly pursuing that infallible perpetuity into which all others must diminish their diameters, and be poorly seen in angles of contingency.

Dr. J. The passage takes me between wind and water, both by reason of its meaning and the stateliness of it. I did not, however, set out to deny that there are rhythmic sentences in prose. And I grant also that a queenly walk, a lofty carriage, are more to be admired than ordinary dancing. What I maintain is that the rhythm of poetry, being, unlike that of prose, fettered by metre, delivers poetry from the law of common sense, as a prisoner is delivered from the ordinary responsibilities of life. To be a prisoner is itself, both for the observer and the sufferer, a more interesting, a more absorbing, condition than to be free. Every spontaneous action and word of a prisoner assume extraordinary significance; and the expression or concealment of his

emotions, his very nonsense and grimaces, obtain a value of which freedom knows nothing. The dancer and the poet are prisoners, and as long as they move, yielding to their impulses and exerting their energies in their chosen or imposed fetters, they arrest and hold the attention, and, in proportion to the beauty and passion of the art displayed, entertain and satisfy the imagination of the spectator, of the listener or competent reader.

J. B. I am astonished, sir, to hear you maintain that poetry is above common sense.

Dr. J. It is so, nevertheless. Attempt to translate Mercutio's Queen Mab speech into prose, and see what you will make of it. Or take a serious passage — Othello's famous image —

> Like to the Pontick sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er knows retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontick and the Hellespont;

Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent
pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble
love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up.

Reduce this to prose and it would be impossible to read it with a sober face. It is the metre, the lightning dance of it, that lays common sense under a spell. To say it slowly, would almost be to translate it into prose. Poetry is like music, and must be taken at its proper time; and here the verse leaps, straining to the cataract of the close:

> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up.

I am certain that I have not been enabled to speak according to my wont, and have been made to say things altogether out of character, as well as anachronistic; but, sir, I am always glad to be resuscitated under any conditions not dishonourable.

POETRY AND CRITICISM

POETRY AND CRITICISM

"IT is very questionable whether a poet can have any vital interest in any poetry except his own. I think a poet gradually ceases to take any interest in literature as literature. As part of life, literature, whether it be poetry or prose, occupies an inferior place in the world. Compare literature, for example, with eating and drinking, with making love, with making money. Literature in the banquet of life is now a *hors d'œuvre,* now a cigarette; no more than that. Consider, then, what an insignificant thing the criticism of literature must be. I often wonder who reads reviews; with the exception of the reviewer and the author reviewed, who are they? People read books from the librarian's list and from gossip at dinner, not upon the advice of the critic."

"Then where is the use of criticism?"

"It has no use, of course; but apart from the question of utility, this enormous production of books of all kinds, and the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly waste of criticism is the result of enchantment. You must never forget that the whole world is enchanted. People can't help themselves; they have language, they have pens and paper; one writes, another writes. And it is all inferior, the very highest of it, to a thing done. The power of the pen has been grossly exaggerated. Napoleon, not Goethe, made the modern world. Everybody knows the life of Napoleon and its meaning — "the tools to him that can handle them." Every man goes Nap; and the women want to play too."

"I'm afraid you'll be very cruel to the poets."

"Oh no! A poet is always a man of inordinate ambition and inordinate vanity. If his every book is not universally pronounced the finest poetry since Shakespeare

he incontinently breaks his heart. But if he is really a poet his heart mends again, and is the stronger for the catastrophe. I do not say this to signify that I purpose splintering hearts out of kindness. I merely indicate that I understand the poetical temperament, and that if I should hurt anyone, I know the immense recuperative power of the poet too well to be over-concerned; and everybody will tell you that if a poet or any other writer can be killed by criticism the sooner it is done the better."

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Froude. *Carlyle.*

FROUDE. I have often thought that we need in literature something analogous to Pre-Raphaelitism in art.

Carlyle. What is Pre-Raphaelitism?

F. I hardly know. The Pre-Raphaelites were, I believe, artists who picked up art not where Raphael left off but where he began.

C. It doesn't matter much. Their idea, I dare say, was to get rid of all convention, and begin art over again for themselves. And that was highly commendable. Something analogous to that is desirable in literature. Tennyson with his confections of passion for use in ladies' seminaries, and Browning with his frantic, terrified optimism, and the restless, over-

hasty spinning-jenny in his head, are not much to my liking. They both of them represent England of the broadened franchise and repealed corn-law; they are bourgeois to the core, and rose to eminence with the rise of the middle class, the dominant factor in the life of the century.

F. What do you say to "The City of Dreadful Night," by James Thomson?

C. Thomson's poems will always command attention because they sprang directly out of his life. I think that he was by Nature endowed beyond any of the English poets of his time. There are no half-measures with Nature when she really takes a matter in hand. And so she gave Thomson, let us say, passion and intellect second only to Shakespeare's; fitted him for the fullest life — not that he might occupy and enjoy, however. Nature is the great spendthrift. She will burn up the world some day to attain what will probably seem to us a very inadequate end; and

in order to have things stated at their worst, once for all, in English, she took a splendid genius and made him — an Army schoolmaster; starved his intellect, starved his heart, starved his body. All the adversity of the world smote him; and that nothing should be wanting to her purpose, Nature took care that the very sun should smite him also! And how gallantly the victim bore himself! Time will avenge him: he is among the immortals. He, indeed, is a Pre-Shakespearian.

F. Ha! What do you mean by a Pre-Shakespearian?

C. I mean, first of all, Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare was no Shakespearian. Often the name of a cult is a misnomer. Three centuries of English ineptitude have made of Shakespeare — not only the popular Shakespeare, but the Shakespeare of the schools — a very tame and bloodless portent indeed, the smug person written of by Hallam, Tennyson's "Shakespeare, bland and mild." They have made

of him a sort of statue of Memnon, with an infinity of notes, it is true, which responded to the sunset as well as the sunrise, and to other reagents; but still an automaton, a musical box which could play any tune, with a preference, surprising in mechanism, to go off with Hamlet. Precisely into Hamlet, the mediocrity, the man in the street; a loquacious person; a busybody, given to reading books after dinner and scribbling on the margins; one that kept a diary and wrote letters to the newspapers. A Parliament-man, a debater! He would have been a good bishop, a good under-secretary; and might have remained solvent as a stock-broker. This is the Shakespeare of the English; the cult of the Shakespearians. Hamlet, the middle-class man, stares out of all our middle-class literature; and there is practically no other in England. Hamlet! Why, Shakespeare was himself a world: Coriolanus and Falstaff are the poles of him: Hamlet is nobody; I prefer Iago.

F. Would you have our literature develop out of Iago and Thersites?

C. I would not have it develop out of Shakespeare at all. I would have men put Shakespeare aside for half a century. He is in the way. Suddenly we find that Shakespeare blocks the road. He was admirable, he was necessary before steam; the world would have been at a standstill without him. Now it can't get on because of him. Steam, electricity, and the newspaper have made Shakespeare out of date; it is they that have turned the world upside down; they and a little word Evolution have wrought in sixty years a greater change than was elaborated in all the centuries from the first Christian community to sansculottism. Men don't know it, or hate to recognise it; they try to be what their literature is, what their old establishments are or seem. They read *Hamlet* and are Shakespearian in an empire the inhabitants of which are mainly Mohammedans, Brahmans, Fire-worshippers; in a country

where the race for wealth has set morality coughing and sweating in a galloping consumption; at a time when the aristocracy of intellect — (the English from the most heraldic peer to the sireless apprentice are the middle-class of Europe, the prosperous, pushing shop-walkers of the world); at a time when the aristocracy of intellect have set their crucibles in the furnace, and have thrown in everything, themselves and all the past, the English are reading *Hamlet*. The hen thought the sky was falling when the pea dropped on her head; but the skies *have* fallen — on the wicked game-cock across the Channel, thinks the English bird of dawning. We are a great race.

F. Out of what, then, is this desirable Pre-Shakespearianism to evolve?

C. Out of a reverence for fact.

F. That has been tried in the cult of *le sens du réel*, in realism, in naturalism.

C. I did not say a reverence for matter-of-fact.

F. Indeed it was a hideous development.

C. Oh, much adverse comment has been elicited by the writings of a certain school; but the acute stage is past, and literature has been purged of some of the peccant humours that accumulate during periods of transition: the python comes forth brilliant from his old skin, but the process of sloughing is not comely. That matter-of-fact fiction, as far as it succeeded in being matter-of-fact, was the mere lifeless eschar of literature; through it the new tegument appeared living and healthy. But truly it was in dead earnest. It tried to wrap its imagination in a napkin, bury it certain fathoms in the earth, and go about with a notebook painting its epoch. That could not last; that could not even get begun. The point of view of realism was essentially the Devil's point of view. The adversary, the accuser, started out with notebook and stylographic pen.

F. It might have shamed our easy-going sinners to know that the chance of escaping detection was much minimised when the Devil learned shorthand.

C. Oh, no! for the Devil, when he set himself to examine the matter carefully, discovered that man is a stomach, first and last. For some time, this discovery, like the discovery of the New World, was a thing expected, a thing known — but how to get there? Like all great achievements it was quite simple — easier than setting an egg on its end, or sailing to America.

F. How, then?

C. By asserting it. "Man is a stomach." Great is assertion. At once the complex world is simplified. It is found to consist of beef and greens, which man, the stomach, can distil into blood. But how is this? What has happened to our sublime theory of irregular verbs? How has the stomach become saddled with this Old Man of the Sea, these entirely supererogatory organs which perform the unwar-

rantable functions of thinking and imagining? How much better if man had been as the hydras, patent reversible handbags that live most self-sufficingly in ditches, and can be turned outside-in without damage. Alas! man is not a hydra. The great discovery turned out to be no discovery. The realist assiduously attempting to set down whatever is commonplace, whatever is matter-of-fact, *en pleine platitude*, struggling to circumscribe his *sens du réel* by those things only which can be touched, tasted, smelt, found himself, to his amazement, haunted at every step by a ghost which would not be laid — Imagination, in all men, but most unescapably in himself. He has to write alone, in his study, far from the presence of the people and business of his work. And the bulk of his realities is picked up at second-hand — from reports, from conversations, newspapers, documents. There is no help for it, but to imagine. The attempt has been made, from the Devil's point of view, to state man as a stom-

ach, and, in order even to get the attempt started, it was necessary to employ what is divinest in man — his imagination.

F. But we are no nearer the fountain of a desirable Pre-Shakespearianism.

C. It will come! It will come! The first bubblings of it may be heard already.

F. Where? where? Shall I, for example, find a rill of it in Nietszche?

C. In Nietszche! How dare you mention Nietszche to me? A great man; a man of unexampled divulsive power, but spoilt for want of a knowledge of my writings. And it is your fault — your meagre nature that could make no more of me than that ill-tempered, lugubrious figure you so often bored to death. Your life of me is the worst disservice literature has ever suffered. Out of it the world knows me, and cares not for my books on that account. It is Froude, not Carlyle, that the world and Nietszche know; of you Nietszche's final word on me may be true: "He is an

English atheist who aspires to honour for not being one." It is false of me. The realist would state the world as stomach. Nietszche stated it as Chaos. Both have been called Diabolists; but there is no such being as a Diabolist. Even those wretched creatures who celebrate the black mass are in that very act non-diabolic, for they are endeavouring to worship. God, as well as the Devil, is in all men. Had I written my "Exodus from Houndsditch" I would have employed the Devil to burn up the weeds, but I would have saved the ethical hemp-stalk of it. In Nietszche's "Exodus from Houndsditch" he has burnt up the morality, too; he could see nothing else for it but that. Woe's me! The message which is in the very name Diogenes Teufelsdröckh has fallen on stony ground!

F. I have heard that Nietszche, having destroyed the whole world of thought, intended a reconstruction.

C. He did. He meant to restate the world as Lust for Power.

F. Would you recommend Englishmen to read Nietszche?

C. I would indeed. Such a tonic the world of letters has not had for a thousand years. Nietszche set himself, smiling, to dislodge the old earth from its orbit; and — it is something against such odds — the dint of his shoulder will remain for ever.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Baptist Lake. *Islay Inglis.*

BAPTIST LAKE. I haven't seen you for five years. Where have you been?

Islay Inglis. In Dover, for a holiday.

B. L. Dover? Well!

I. I. I know what you mean; but I tried Folkestone, and found it intolerable. I sat on a chair on the Leas all a forenoon. The band played; the seated crowd, all on chairs, mainly ladies, hushed and solemn, glanced furtively at labelled fiction, cautiously turning the leaf. Gentlemen, groomed like carriage-hacks, attired in hot-pressed suits they seemed afraid to crease, conversing at intervals in diplomatic whispers, trod the withered turf — withered and beaten to powder by the unslaked steps of

the march of summer and the superfine tread of uneasy fashion. The flame-tipped music of *Carmen,* the molten sapphire of the sea, the saffron beach far down, and the lofty sun emptying its inexhaustible urn of fire, were all tamed and fettered to the living death of a well-to-do crowd, enchanted out of humanity into the likeness of unedified and unedifying creatures. At Folkestone Holiday is a Function.

B. L. Terrible; but accurate, I fear. Function is the gangrene of modern social life. But what led you to Dover?

I. I. Chance. I —.

B. L. Now, how often have I asked you, Islay, never to use the word "chance"? The use of misnomers is the propagation of ignorance. Endeavour always to think the unthinkable; give at least a new name to the unknown, and in time you will pave the abyss and cast a bridge over the Milky Way. You went to Dover, you say, actuated by the profound law which led you there. Well?

I. I. My first intention was to walk about Romney Marsh. You know "the earth is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh." Romney Marsh is, I suppose, one of the newest pieces of land in the Old World. No ancient Briton ever trod its southern verge; and the waves rolled over it while the neighbouring seaboards echoed the drums and tramplings of three conquests. There must be virtue in such virgin soil. It is the true country for Antæus. But there was no room in Dymchurch, not even in the inn — the virtue of the land is known to many. So I forwent Romney Marsh, and took rooms on the Marine Parade in Dover after that dreadful experience at Folkestone.

B. L. Was that beautiful girl with you — Rose Salerne, who drank shandy-gaff with the thirst of perdition in the "Rose and Crown" at Pilgrimstow?

I. I. Rose Inglis now, Baptist.

B. L. You married her! My dear boy, that was exquisite of you.

I. I. I think it was exquisite of us both.

B. L. And so daring!

I. I. True; the marriage of a really intelligent couple is now the most daring exploit reserved for the adventurous.

B. L. It was more daring to go to Dover for a holiday.

I. I. Not for me. I was quite at home in Dover. The majority of the holiday-makers there are of the lower-middle class, to which I belong.

B. L. The lower-middle class, Islay?

I. I. Yes; the fountain of aristocracy — not, of course, the parasitical aristocracy of birth and title, but the best blood and brain of the world. Consider it briefly, at a venture. Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns, Carlyle, all of humble extraction.

B. L. Dante?

I. I. On the mother's side, certainly.

B. L. Cervantes?

I. I. There must be exceptions; but although Cervantes' parentage was of rank on both sides, in order that what was best in him should appear he had to be brought lower even than the lower-middle class; out of slavery and prison he came, the greatest man as man of those who lived by writing.

B. L. And what about men of action?

I. I. Zenghis Khan, Tamerlane — sheepstealers and landloupers; Moses, the son of slaves in Egypt; Mahomet's father, although, like all the lower-middle class, related to some of the highest families, was a poor man; Alexander of Macedon, Julius Cæsar, William the Conqueror, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln — a tide of elemental blood beat in the hearts of all these.

B. L. Alexander, the son of a king and of a king's daughter?

I. I. The son of a king's daughter, the luxurious Olympias; his father may have been anybody: Philip himself was willing to ascribe the paternity to Jupiter. Wil-

liam the Conqueror, the tanner's grandson, is a typical example; Robert of Normandy, the parasitical aristocrat of birth and title, in order that his son might be more than that, was compelled to select his mother from the lower-middle classes. Of escutcheons that seem without a blot, who can tell how many mothers, in order that their sons might be great, had to fall back on illegitimate fathers?

B. L. I should like to see you attempt a grammatical analysis of that last sentence! So, then, in order to support your theory, you would tarnish the fame of queens?

I. I. Nothing is sacred to the theorist. But you make me outrageously discursive. I say, I went to Dover with Rose; and we delighted in it, because it is a holiday resort of the lower-middle classes. We sat on the beach and watched the young Mahomets and Tamerlanes at play; we paraded the pier to the strains of the military band; and all the evenings were Elysian with the

electric illumination of the Marine Parade. The wandering minstrel sang —

Rhoda rode a roadster on the road to Ryde;
I also rode a roadster on the road by Rhoda's side;
When next I ride to Ryde with Rhoda she will be my bride:
I bless the day that Rhoda rode a roadster!

and we applauded, and gave him twopence. We went to the theatre thrice in the fortnight (twice a year is all we can endure in London) and had the vitality to survive the artificial dulness of *The Lady Slavey*, and the academic morals of *Liberty Hall* and *The Idler*. At night the moon laid out along the sea a rouleau of silver discs; the Calais Phare twinkled intermittently, a yellow lantern, and Cape Gray Nose burst in anapestic flame — two white, one red — across the Channel, visible from the Bell Harry Tower in Canterbury, sixteen miles inland. On the evening of Dover Regatta,

a magician from London with magnesium and pyrotechnic sorcery fanned the pale cliffs into a red passion of flame and rolling smoke; the castle shone white; catherine-wheels whirled agonised; rockets scaled the heavens in vain; the archways in the cliff-face glowed like the gates of hell; and the youthful Tamerlanes and Mahomets gazed awestruck from the pier-head on Satan's invisible world displayed. In the daytime we visited all the Cinque Ports: Hastings, with its grey castle and gay crowd; Winchelsea, sad and sweet, haunted and haunting, to which the sea was twice a traitor — by inundation, and then, in cruellest irony, by desertion; Rye, pleasant, compact on hilly streets — an old church with gilded quarter-boys, and, through an old gate, masts and the misty sea; the two Romneys, silent, deserted in that strange new land where the grey rails glisten across beds and bars of shingle, and shining meres spread among loops of flat green land; Hythe, with its treasure of hacked skulls — Briton,

Saxon, Roman, Dane, gathered from a long-forgotten battlefield; and Sandwich, oldest, greyest, quaintest of English towns, looking mournfully from three high churches at the distant treacherous sea. And on Sundays I went to Calais to be shaved.

B. L. To Calais?

I. I. That is an operation I could never achieve without hacking my face; and as the barbers are all closed in Dover on Sundays and I had omitted to tryst one, we went to Calais. Return tickets, fifteen shillings; luncheons, six shillings; Figaro, half a franc — twenty-one and sixpence for a shave. You see, we were on a holiday.

B. L. You have described to me an actual, unconventional, and high-spirited holiday. I should have enjoyed it myself.

CHANCTONBURY RING

Extracts from the following essays have appeared heretofore in an English volume but they are published now for the first time in their entirety.

CHANCTONBURY RING

STEYNING, an ancient town of a reticent aspect, most picturesque, but finished, full of variety and engaging detail, stands on the highway to Horsham where the road rises to a spur of the Downs. It is a place of gables, oaken beams, shingle roofs, mature-looking wooden houses, a place of stepped pavements and of old gardens. The railway approached it, but kept its distance. Nothing has soiled it; it belongs to a prior century. One would be glad to see it once a week on an afternoon of mellow sunshine; then its warmth, its old homeliness, the sense of room about it, and of the easiness of life, deliver the thought and refresh the fancy like a well-dreamed sleep. Its air of mystery is never wanting either. Deep doorways, overhanging eaves,

beams strained and bent, narrow entries, windows low and broad, or high and secret, are loaded with meaning. Towns and houses are your only ghosts. Finger on lip, Steyning haunts the foot of Chanctonbury Ring, a picturesque phantom of the old order, a stationary ghost likely to tarry long since the nineteenth century itself has failed to lay it.

Out of Steyning the by-way to Chanctonbury Ring runs for a short mile through a narrow valley, and then ascends the flank of the Downs. In the close silence of the steep-banked way, sounds drifted or swung at anchor: the carnival music of the thrush; the starling's castanets; the muted cymbals and triangles of some stubborn hammering bird. On either hand leafless elms rose from the crest of the slope, and bonfires of dark green boxwood, whose new leaves flamed like greenish gold, studded the opposing acclivities. Ground-ivy, darker even than the boxwood, whose new leaves flamed like greenish gold, festooned the way; night

and the sea were mixed in the hue of this ivy, and its white veins glimmered like pencillings of foam. Dandelions, broad and thick-rayed, as richly petalled as chrysanthemums, and of a golden hue unrivalled by any flower, shone out in clusters and constellations, stars of the first magnitude in a galaxy of cuckoo-buds amid a sky of violets.

The wind was easterly, and its shrill pipe made itself heard as soon as the road left the valley and set itself against the Down. But here the northern slopes are fledged with beech, and the hills looked comely even in the bleak weather of this wintry April. Violets and hyacinths diapered with purple the russet beech-mast, though the cowslips hoarded their gold in their pale green chalices. The white-starred branches of the blackthorn sprinkled the prevailing bronze and purple of the covert with sparse sprays of silver; and the emerald banners of the downy, crisp, and pleated beech-leaves claimed the time for middle-spring,

in spite of the attempted piracy of winter. In a bight of the land, the white, chalky plain, shaded with the sprouting down of the young corn, showed where the tide of harvest will run far up, and break against the swelling hill.

When the crest of the Downs was reached, Chanctonbury Ring was still a mile away; from the long easy slope of the ridge, the back-bone of the world in that neighbourhood, Sussex stretched out on the one hand, and Sussex and the sea on the other — great and varied prospects, but constant quantities for a mile: an interlocutor became at once desirable. That is the secret of the proficient, the truly peregrinate wayfarer. Given a winding road with constant surprises, a straight, confined road leading to the unknown, or a steep ascent that taxes the breath, then the wayfarer is naturally occupied in observing, in expecting, or in enduring; but when he reaches some agreeable and unexacting path, with the goal in sight, and wide,

detached, far-reaching views on either hand, he must let his mind go. Should he compel it in the strict way of observation he errs lamentably, and will find the landscape unsatisfying; he must think of something else. Best of all would be an actual companion: on the lonely top of the Downs constant recourse must be had to imaginary people, disputatious or otherwise, who surprise one by starting subjects thought to be at rest, by talking of men and things one had laid on the shelf. The Imaginary Disputant began about Ibsen and the personality of dramatists.

"In my opinion," said the Disputant, "no writer reveals himself more fully than the dramatist. It is inevitable. The moment you begin to consider the springs of action and the motives of conduct, there is one subject always at hand from infancy to death. Unconsciously, perhaps, at first your intimate acquaintance with this subject appears in your work; then, if you are not a mere botcher and charlatan, sooner or

later the true source of man's knowledge of human nature is revealed to you. It is a terrible revelation; but you cannot, you dare not, ignore it. You try to, doubtless; you even think you succeed in doing so; but your own accent and semblance are heard and seen in the vilest wretches, the grossest fools, as well as in the sweetest natures and the most heroic characters wherewith you mask the good and evil in yourself."

"But can a dramatist not portray at all, then, another than himself? Dramatists have drawn women successfully, for example."

"Yes, but think of the women. Wherever there is vital power at work the dramatist's people are of one mould and order. Compare Ibsen's women with Shakespeare's. However widely each author's women may differ among themselves, Cleopatra and Imogen are hardly distinguishable from each other when you contrast them with Hiördis and Asta Allmers. This sub-con-

sciousness, what is basic in the dramatist, appears in all his creations."

"Well, of course, it must do so; when you come to think of it, it cannot be otherwise."

"Yes, but the literary world generally seems loath to acknowledge it. Fear lurks behind the loathing, I think. Byron is the type of the protesting author, terrified at the self-betrayal in his works."

"About Ibsen, however. He has betrayed himself — he, the strongest, most self-contained of all poets and dramatists?"

"Strong, but not self-contained — anything but self-contained. His plays smoke with his personality. That is the very note of the man: that is his originality. The characters in the best-known of Ibsen's plays, his later ones, professional, middle class, and lower-middle class people, are as dull and uninteresting as they can be; and yet he has peopled the imagination of the Europe of his time with these undistinguished beings, because they are all Ibsen.

They were metal of no mark or value: Ibsen alloys them with his personality, stamps them with his image and superscription, and they become current throughout the world. A mistaken realism seems to advise the drawing of men exactly as they are. If it could be done, you would have at last something worthy to be called a *caput mortuum;* but it is an impossibility. You could no more take crude man and place him in a novel or a play — that is, make him literature, than you could make a lump of iron ore into a carving-knife by laying it on the table along with a fork and steel. Humanity is the raw material of literature; the smelting, the fining, the casting, the shaping, the damascening are the work of the creative artist, whose indispensable medium is his own personality."

"Well, then, how would you describe the personality of Ibsen?"

"Ah! I am too near him — and here we are at the top of the hill."

In the British-Roman work on the summit of Chanctonbury a plantation grows now. A woodman with measured stroke drove wedges into the bole of a tree, and his boys played beside him. A crescent-shaped coppice of beech uncut for years girdled the hill. In the sheltered hollows beeches clustered; beech groves clad all the northern slopes. The leaf-buds of the beech, small spear-heads of bronze, washed the downs with a dark ruddy hue like the dull glow of a furnace door. The haze on the horizon beat and flickered, a heavy eyelid drooping over the sky. White gables stood out on the plain, apparitions among the dark, budding woods. Red roofs, the smoke of houses, cream-white ribbons of road, touched the green and purple ground with points of colour and light. Seaward the furze scattered gold over the rolling land down to the shingly beach; and the pearl-grey sea under a sky of hammered iron shone with an inward lustre treasured in its deeps and garnered from many a

shining summer. The east wind sighed and wailed, but through its forlorn note there sounded a sheep bell from the fold and a cuckoo's mellow chime.

BY-WAYS

BY-WAYS

THE road was from the sea inland, and then, for a mile, parallel with the shore, skirting the verge of the cliffless Downs. The wind, from the south-east, sharp and vapoury, carried brine and haze over the southern counties; but its transparent burden was barely visible in the strong sunshine; a pallor, as of the thinnest coating of varnish, overspread the faint blue sky. The sun, an hour past noon, showed small and round, shorn of its beams by the dim haze; hot and glittering, all the same, like an eye-hole opening into a vat of molten silver. Upon the horizon the vapour began to build itself up in tiers and courses; but the rest of the firmament was clear, save for the thin veil of mist and one solitary plume of white cloud that streamed

from the top of heaven. A wooded park, like a broad hem, edged the sunken Downs. Groves, avenues, and single trees resounded with the business of the rookery. The incessant, harsh, sibilant-raucous noise, rising and falling in gusts and squalls, swept the park from end to end. Sometimes a plangent voice soared out of the ground-tone in wild protest against the universe or a thieving neighbour; now a cloud of rooks would rise and adjourn from their tree-tops to a select space in the air, and there gyrate and discuss a knotty point with the unparliamentary liberty the problem required; or the low, deep-toned, self-satisfied caw of experienced and well-to-do rooks, who had settled themselves for the season weeks ago, would become distinctly audible in some lull of the stormy outcry, some reprieve of that friction which the clan-economy of a rookery entails.

After the park was passed, the low naked Downs rose and dipped like sluggish waves, like stagnant waves enchanted and sus-

pended there in ungainly and painful postures. Indeed, there is nothing in landscape more unsatisfactory to the æsthetic sense, more uncomfortable to the mood of the spectator, than the seaward slope of the Downs. Where a bold escarpment fronts the Channel the unnatural condition of these bereft hills is not perhaps so forcible in its pathetic appeal; but even then the nakedness of the land distresses. These low, rolling hills should be covered with forest, as they were originally. It is nature's plan. The mid-Surrey hills, or the Chilterns between Wendover and Prince's Risborough, in conformation and distribution the very images of the South Downs, are perfect in the richness, the secrecy and repose of their wooded, their heavily draped contours. But this unfortunate range by the sea is doomed to thrust out along the shore its naked slopes and mounds like the limbs and shoulders of plucked fowls. The expense of a luxury is not calculable in currency alone; the

beauty of the South Downs is the prime cost of Southdown mutton.

But the furze blooms even here. Most incongruous it seems, a bracelet of gold and emerald high up on a brawny arm, all muscle and goose-flesh. One has to be fanciful to keep these Downs in countenance. The ploughed land, however, puts no strain on the imagination. Labour has redeemed it. Nothing is more beautiful than a ploughed field; and here, where the alloy of clay and chalk shines in the silver-gilt and deeply chased furrows of the broad fields, there seems to pass over the face of the earth a smiling promise of the golden harvest asleep in its bosom. Yet these splendid fields, like many other passages, must be separated from their context before their beauty and prophecy become apparent. In their place upon the shivering Downs, when the sun is veiled and the south-east comes with a fierce sting, they might easily be mistaken for pieces of sacking, old corn-bags, hung on the flanks

of the exposed land in lieu of a blanket.

The song of the lark has taken entire possession of the air. Like a heaven-high vine it garlands the whole firmament. In the rookery or here, again, passing a row of sheepfolds where the hillside is plaintive with the bleating of lambs, the larks are inaudible; but when these undergrowths, jungles, and mere wildernesses of sound are past, the hanging gardens of the larks absorb the senses. From dawn till dusk, and from the middle-spring through the full blaze of summer to the smouldering golden moons of autumn, these garlands of sound, leaf and flower and fruit, fresco and fantasy and arabesque, will wreathe and overrun the shining air.

A raw path leading northward, with an unbarbered hedge on one side and forlorn market-gardens on the other — a path that seemed bound to end in a slough of despond, pulled itself together suddenly, and with a certain air of knowing its business well enough, stepped into Portslade,

a village in a cup. This is the inland Portslade, a mile above the railway one known to the South Coast traveller. On one lip of the cup, a short Early English, ivy-covered tower of St. Nicholas balances itself sturdily; and the yellow lichen that lacquers the shingle-roof makes it a glory and a wonder — like the roof of heaven "inlaid with patines of bright gold." Here, indeed, a green-gold lichen gilds every rough surface that the sea-wind can reach. Stems, branches, twigs of trees, railings that have been long without a fresh coat of paint, the plaster of the walls and of the houses, are all enamelled with the hue of chrysoprase.

A back way led to the northern brow of the hill, where a ghostly windmill overlooks Hangleton. Hangleton Place, a Tudor manor ensconced in the valley, is now a poultry-farm; and in Hangleton churchyard is buried Dr. Kenealy. The tombstone, erected by public subscription, as one had forgotten, is a table of grey gran-

ite with florid mosaics in red and blue; a cross on the top, and a four-square band of shamrocks and roses, with dates of birth and death about it; also this text, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Curiously enough, on the morning of the day the Itinerant stumbled on Dr. Kenealy's tomb the very remarkable impostor whose notoriety the doctor had shared ended his career in a poor lodging off the Edgware road. More years ago than the Itinerant cares to remember a boy engaged in weighing portions of 16.6 grammes of beet for precipitation with acetate of lead in the polariscopic analysis of sugar, saw through the glass of the chemical balance in the Public Analyst's Laboratory in Cathcart Street, Greenock, a vast moon face at a window in an upper storey of the Tontine Hotel opposite. Three quarters of the face were visible — for more than an hour, dull, motionless. No one seemed to come into the room. Did "the Claimant" sit

there to be seen of men? He was to lecture in the Town Hall that night. Perhaps he was recapitulating his speech. At any rate, he sat there for more than an hour, expressionless and motionless. He did not appear to watch the bustle in the street; he did not smoke; he did not drum on anything with his fingers. He simply sat still. To exist and digest was enough for this man apparently. In all likelihood he never experienced a truly unhappy moment. He was only an automaton cunningly fitted with digestion and memory. If conscience be deleted, life is much simplified, three-quarters of it, conduct namely, becoming a blank. The deletion, or at any rate the subordination, of conscience is well known to be a main factor in many a reputation; and Arthur Orton had certainly obtained the upper hand of his. Ask the clearest conscience in the world to sit for an hour motionless, with no one in the room, and nothing to do! It is not conscience that performs feats of

that kind; they are the achievements of genius, or of beings whose monstrous defects seem to be equivalent to the possession of genius.

The square tower of Shoreham Church, a landmark for miles, stood out on the way back, and in front of it the sea, immediately under the sun, shone with pale gold; but the rest of the Channel was dark and narrow, for the haze had thrust its broad bastion close in to the land. The haze, indeed, had become the main feature in that part of the world. Built up on the horizon, a magical foundation, the grey vapour, like a fragile urn, enclosed the spaces of the air. At the round mouth of the urn, high up, the sky appeared, a pale blue disc against which the song of the larks beat in vain, echoing back in showers of golden notes.

PROSE ECLOGUE

PROSE ECLOGUE

Basil, Menzies, Brian.

BRIAN. Have you ever written short stories, Basil?

Basil. Never; nor can I read them.

Brian. I rather like them.

Basil. Then your palate's gone — I mean your mental palate. I still prefer a sandwich: bread — meat — mustard. The short story is mere mustard, the scanty dish which Grumio, that "false, deluding slave," jeered Katharina with.

Brian. Your short-story men are your only pickle-merchants.

Basil. Occasionally they are good men gone wrong; oftenest they are single-prong men.

Menzies. Single-prong?

Basil. Yes. Some men are tridents,

some are dinner-forks, some are pitch-forks, and some have but one prong. Of these last are the short-story men, the "strong men" of fiction. They remind me of the Parisian *chiffonnier*, who gathers from frequented places with his pointed stick odds and ends of paper and rags. They are an insufferable nuisance; their pens are always ready furbished; if you so much as hint an idea, an experience, an episode, they stab it up at once and thrust it into their wallets among an omnium gatherum of other half-ideas, experiences, and episodes, where it lies till it is "high," and is then brought forth as "strong meat."

Brian. And who are the dinner forks?

Basil. Average men, I suppose.

Brian. And the pitch-forks?

Basil. Why, *you* are pretty like one, pursuing relentlessly a passing remark.

Brian. And the tridents? Come, the tridents?

Basil. My friends and I.

Menzies. Good. Did you know that I had written short stories?

Brian. No! Tell us all about it.

Basil. What is there to tell except that for every story he wrote there is a grey hair on his soul?

Menzies. That is true. But I would confess; I have never told it to anyone, the stories having been anonymous. The first one was of a woman I knew; a tall fair Scotchwoman, with a perfect oval face and large pale eyes. In her twenty-fourth year she married a painter and set herself to destroy his temperament. I met her in her father's house shortly after she had spoiled her husband, body and soul; and she told me the story herself. "He kept talking to me," she said, "of temperament, temperament, temperament. What is temperament? Do you know? Does anyone know? I have no temperament; but I suppose he had, for he was different from me. He liked all kinds of stupidity and foolishness — little children,

religious people, romance, and sentiment. After the honeymoon, when he went back to his easel, he nearly swooned at the sight of it; for I had determined to see of what stuff his temperament was made, and had painted a leer on the faces of his figures. He tore up the canvas and began anew. As soon as he had a face drawn, at night I put a leer into the eyes or a wicked smile on the lips. He went to his easel every morning shaking with terror. I had now fully made up my mind that he should get rid of his temperament and become as strong as I, for I rather liked him; he was very handsome. So I persevered with his faces, and was amazed at *his* persistence. At last one morning he asked me to stay beside him while he painted. He drew and coloured the heads of three cherubs with extraordinary rapidity and force, the practice which my device had secured him having increased his skill immensely. The faces were sweet and beautiful; and he asked me if they were not so.

I said I rather liked them, but that I saw nothing particularly sweet about them: charming little imps, I called them. 'Then I am a lost man,' he cried. 'Something terrible has gone wrong with me. Day after day I paint what I think beautiful faces; these that I have just done seem to me adorable. You see them as they are, leering and malicious; and to-morrow I too shall see them as they are. Some subtle paralysis has attacked me.' Next morning, as usual, he found his faces impudent or malignant. I comforted him, and told him to struggle no more against his own nature, but to follow this inferior bent which proclaimed itself in spite of him. 'I will,' he said. 'It may work itself out.' Then an evil spirit took actual possession of him, and he painted loathsome and horrible things. He was a weak man; his temperament had only been degraded, not yet destroyed. One night I changed his diabolic into angelic faces; and in the morning he came to me weeping tears of

joy. 'I have worked it out,' he cried. 'I am free of it. Yesterday, while I designed what I thought the most wicked group of countenances ever imagined, I was painting divinities. Come and see them.' I excused myself till the afternoon; and he, happy and jubilant, went out to walk off his excitement. In his absence I changed his divinities into idiots and maniacs. When at length he led me to his studio he had no eyes for anything but me. I felt him watching me as I stood in front of his picture. I looked at it, and then with cold surprise at his glad, eager face. The blood left his cheeks like a lamp that's blown out; he glanced at his picture, and fell in a tremor on the floor. I helped him to a seat, placed myself opposite him, and told him how I had manipulated his canvases in the hope of enabling him to master his temperament. When he realised what I said, he slid from his chair glaring at me as if I had been a wild beast about to devour him. I moved

to help him again, but he shrank from me, shrieking, 'Keep off!' He crept backwards on his hands and knees, growling and glaring at me hideously. He reached the door and kicked at it as a beast might, flinging out his legs. He has never stood erect since; he lives in a stall and eats out of a manger; the asylum doctor says he cannot recover. What is temperament? Have I destroyed his, or is it now rampant? How weak he was! Is temperament what people used to mean by soul?" What do you think of that?

Brian. It's very strong.

Basil. Very fair mustard.

Menzies. Right! It's just mustard, and not really strong; no bread, no meat, merely condiment. In the famous old image, it is a convulsion; sometimes six men can't hold a feeble epileptic. But I got to like fits, especially as I found that I possessed the knack of taking them; so I had a series in various periodicals; and got good money too: people are always

generous to a man in a fit. Gradually, however, it became more difficult to fall into them; I had to work myself up — with stimulants. At last nothing would cause them; and I took to feigning them —picking up episodes like the *chiffonnier* in your image, instead of creating: in my own image, chewing soap in order to foam at the mouth like the impostor in the street: and nobody but myself knew the difference.

Brian. But you don't apply this generally? There are plenty of good short, strong stories by good strong men.

Basil. Good condiment.

Menzies. Good convulsions: most interesting, attracting great crowds; but only convulsions.

Basil. Any one line of actual poetry is worth a million short stories.

Menzies. Here's one. "Up rose the sun, and up rose Emily."

Brian. Yes; but they are geniuses —

great men, some of those short-story writers.

Menzies. My dear Brian, we are all geniuses nowadays.

Basil. Admirable! All men are geniuses: it is only a difference of degree.

ON INTERVIEWING

ON INTERVIEWING

PROSE ECLOGUE

Basil — Sandy — Brian — Menzies.

BRIAN. Did you ever interview anybody, Basil?

Basil. Yes; but I shall never do the like again.

Brian. I suppose you felt very small.

Basil. Yes. Not nearly so small, however, as the man I interviewed; of that I am certain.

Sandy. I suppose it is really a degrading thing for both parties.

Brian. Were you ever interviewed?

Basil. No; but once I was asked to be.

Brian. And what did you reply?

Basil. Why, I said I was much obliged, but begged to decline, because I thought

it a very illegitimate advertisement for the interviewee, and a most illegitimate way of turning a guinea for the "interwiever," as they used to spell it in France. He argued with me, and I explained what I meant. I told him that if he were interested in my great unread works and in my personality, the thing for him to do was to buy the works or read them in the British Museum, and then write his article; that that would be a journeymanlike proceeding, creditable and reflecting credit. Interviewing, I said, was a most miraculous device whereby a man's brains were picked with his own consent. I told him that the very highest kind of man must perforce become a snob, however temporarily, the moment he submitted to the question; and that the "interwiever" in the exercise of his trade was on the same footing as a lacquey. I pointed out how injurious it was to pander to the idle curiosity of the public, and declared that if my books were not to be read for themselves, they should certainly

not be read because of a mawkish interest in me.

Brian. That's what Keats said; he would have no "mawkish popularity."

Sandy. Yes, but interviewing is sometimes quite legitimate, I think. For example: if a man happens to be a great authority on a public question which has become critical, an interview might be the best way of publishing his opinion.

Basil. That, of course. But we were talking of the personal interview, which is the interview *par excellence.*

Brian. The only one, to all intents and purposes. Anything else is quite exceptional.

Menzies (*with repressed passion*). Mawkish, did you say? You called it mawkish?

Basil. Hillo, Menzies, old chap! What's the matter with you?

Sandy. Menzies has been interviewed two or three times recently.

Brian. The devil he has!

Basil. It was Keats called it mawkish, Menzies — Keats. Pistols if you like; but remember, it was Keats.

Menzies. Where is the use of talking about Keats? There was no interviewing in his time; besides, he was only a child when he died. His remarks on conduct are not of the least consequence.

Sandy. Oh, come!

Menzies. I mean what I say. Keats was a great man, and would have been, had he lived, a consummate artist in living as well as a consummate artist in poetry. But as far as life went, he was only in the nursery when he died. The school of life is marriage and paternity.

Basil. Yes; well?

Menzies. Well, it is this word mawkish I want to get at. What's the meaning of it? I see it dealt about in reviews pretty liberally. The meaning of mawkish? Define — define!

Basil. It meant loathsome, maggotty, making the gorge rise; but it has lost its

stronger meaning. You never see it applied to Zola. Now it is used of affected sentiment, of gush, of unctuous morality, of artistic cant, of religiosity, of general flabbiness.

Menzies. Then the world is full of mawkishness.

Basil. Chockfull.

Menzies. In that case I cannot help being mawkish on occasion; for I myself am and have nothing; moods drive through me; individual moods, and the world's moods.

Basil. Nonsense, Menzies! You're not going to make yourself a "terrible example" of everything, are you?

Menzies. What if I have no choice?

Basil. Oh, and that was why you submitted to the "interwiever"! How many times were you interviewed?

Menzies. Four times.

Basil. And about what?

Menzies. Myself.

Basil. Well, in the most dispassionate

way and speaking with the authority of one in an advanced form in the school of life, I say that it was mawkish.

Menzies. I was annoyed at the word at first, but I am quite willing to admit that it was mawkish.

Basil. And glory in it!

Menzies. No; I don't glory in anything. All that I contend is that I am quite willing to be called mawkish along with the majority of mankind, my meaning being, of course, that there is no such thing as mawkishness; that to have fits of sentimentality, to gush, to sermonise, to talk cant about art, to be pharisaical, to be interviewed — is to be human. You never can understand a thing by sneering at it. I would abolish all such words as mawkish, maudlin, snob, cad, cant; they are despiteful, intolerant words. See here. In Bacon's time Philosophy included Science; now Science includes Philosophy. Literature has hitherto stood apart, embracing when it chose, in a more or less cavalier

manner, both Philosophy and Science; but in our time Science is going to embrace, has already flung its arm about, Literature, and —

Sandy. Oh, oh!

Menzies. But it is not a question of whether one likes it or not. The thing is happening before our eyes. Both the method and the results of science have been applied to fiction by Zola, to the drama by Ibsen: these two are the most powerful literary influences of our time — like them or not; that is so — and what they have started must go on —

Sandy. But romance?

Menzies. Romance must just "fettle its fine joints" to the yoke of science, or betake itself to a nunnery; and my point is that, as science knows neither intolerance nor despite, the words mawkish, maudlin, snob, cant, cad, etc., are unscientific, and therefore meaningless and illiterate.

Basil. But what has all this got to do with interviewing?

Menzies. Everything. In literature we have had Creators and Spectators; now we are having Experiencers. All our work is becoming more and more consciously autobiographic; and we must invite experience, we must offer ourselves to the vivisection of circumstance. Remember, I am saying nothing as to whether this is a temporary disaster for literature or not. But that it is being done, and that it will be done universally, I am certain; and I am equally certain that in the end it must make immensely for beauty, and that faculty in beauty called righteousness. The Experiencer is here: I see him and her at every turning — I shan't mention names, but there they are — many minds, but all of one mood to see the thing that is, to shirk nothing, to have done with trappings, to lay bare, to encounter, to say, as well as be, what we are — not what we might imagine ourselves, not even what we would like to be. And this is a great mood, I think; the mood in which men and women wish to

be and to be known as they are, to respect and to be respected, to love and to be loved simply for what they are: the very greatest mood since the time of Shakespeare, when men saw themselves as demigods.

Basil. It is very interesting, Menzies, and I believe I see your meaning. But about this interviewing.

Menzies. Well, I was simply submitting to an experiment; and although my interviewers — three gentlemen and a lady — were most accomplished and agreeable people, I own I didn't like it.

Basil. What did you not like about it?

Menzies. I was just very uncomfortable; and there was that most horrible of all feelings — a desire to say more than was necessary, such as Topsy yielded to when "'fessing" to Miss Ophelia.

Sandy. But you didn't yield to it.

Menzies. Oh, I said things I shouldn't have said, and left unsaid things I should, both in matters of fact and opinion. There you are: you are asked a question,

and you give an answer more or less thoughtlessly, sometimes appearing to be interested in matters to which you are quite indifferent.

Sandy. But you see a proof, don't you?

Menzies. Oh, yes; and I made some changes, but not many, and none of them essential, because I did not wish to appear other than I was. A mistake, I see clearly now. My mind works so slowly that I had to be interviewed four times before I found the real meaning of the personal interview.

Basil. And what is that?

Menzies. Instead of giving plain answers to plain questions, I should have been prepared with an ideal autobiography couched in telling phrases, and so have established a legend — a splendid background for myself.

Basil. That would have been very scientific!

Sandy. I guess Menzies is ironical.

But I don't agree with Basil about the ethic of the interview. The interview is *here;* you may develop it or degrade it, but you cannot destroy it.

Menzies. Right. The interview existed in embryo in the first movable type. Indeed, any publication is an interview; and its direct employment to-day is inevitable. There is no limit to its indirect employment. The congregation has an interview with the preacher, and the interview, called a sermon, is published for the world to read; the lecturer, the platform speaker, is interviewed by his audience; and what are the speeches in the Houses of Parliament but the nation interviewing the powers that be? We have already Government by Interview.

Sandy. Bravo! And it seems to me that out of the personal interview something of real importance may be evolved. The want of mutual charity between men and women, trades and professions, cliques and coteries, classes and masses, between

peoples and continents, is, of course, the result of mutual misunderstanding. How could this gulf of enmity be bridged over better than by people in all ranks of society, and in all the ends of the earth, opening frankly their minds and hearts to each other in daily interviews in every newspaper?

Brian. By Jove! Reform the world by interviewing!

Basil. I like this better now. That is what Menzies was driving at a little while ago. Literature, even newspaper literature, must become consciously autobiographic. We can never go back on Rousseau's "Confessions," Goethe's "Fact and Fancy," Carlyle's "Reminiscences." We must — How did Menzies put it?

Sandy. I remember. We must be, and be known, just as we are; respect and be respected, love and be loved, for what we are.

Basil. Yes. The world has been standing on too great ceremony with itself; it

must now take itself into its own confidence.

Menzies. Good. That is the only way in which we can come within hail of the time, long-preached, long-prayed-for, and so long of coming,

> "When man to man the world o'er
> Shall brithers be for a' that."

ON THE DOWNS

ON THE DOWNS

IT was time to walk about the world again. That which happens to most men and horses, at least once in their lives, most frequently at the end, had happened to the Itinerant; circumstances had obliged him to stumble on between the shafts long after he should have been turned out to grass. Standing in his cab-rank one day, very limp and doleful, he said to himself, "I've had enough of this; I'll give my last kick and die on the spot." So he flung out with all the vigour at his command; but instead of kicking his last and dropping down dead, he only threw over the traces, and smashed his match-box of a hansom. Finding himself at liberty, he promptly set off down the street, and was out of sight before the drowsy cabmen, lounging against the railings of the church,

grasped the fact that he had left his situation. Fear of capture made the running, and he soon reached the Downs.

Leaving the more literal similitude of a cab-horse, and retaining the spirit of it, the Itinerant did not at once, nor, indeed, for a considerable time, betake himself to grass with the assiduity becoming a true Nebuchadnezzar. When a Scotsman finds himself at cross purposes with life, what course does he follow? He may say to himself, as the Itinerant did, "I will go and walk about the Downs." Or he may say, "I will write a great poem"; or "I will go and preach in Hyde Park." He may say this, and he may say that, but he invariably does one of two things. He either sits down and drinks deeply, thoughtfully, systematically, of the amber spirit of his country, or he reads philosophy. The Itinerant read philosophy. Doubtless, philosophers never read philosophy: they have no necessity to do so. The universe is as clear to them as a crystal

ball, or a soap-bubble, or a whinstone — each according to his own theory. But to the ordinary layman and heavily-burdened wayfarer, above all to Scotsmen at cross purposes with life, philosophy is a sad temptation. To the very man in the street, indeed, it occasionally happens that the riddle of the universe grows vehement in its appeal; and, however secretly and shamefastly, "the poor inhabitant below" examines again the interpretations that have been wrought out by others; sets himself to answer the problem anew; finally, burns his books, shaves, dines at a restaurant, and returns to Piccadilly and the bosom of his family.

The Itinerant, then, shut himself up with the Downs behind and the sea in front, and read many books that he had read before, and many that were new to him. Remembering that both Sterne and Brunel, the former at least preceptively, the latter by example, recommend horizontal repose as the surest eliminative of cerebration, he

lay on his back for days at a time, thinking, or trying to think; but that luxurious attitude seems to be reserved for the happy sublimation of humour and science: its effect upon the Itinerant was only to precipitate him more deeply in the turbid solution to which his reading and brooding had reduced all things. Not a moment too soon he shifted the venue; climbed out of the metaphysical lye and reached the Downs at last.

It was the end of January. There had been no winter; but now it seemed about to begin. Although the wind was westerly, it blew harsh and cold, rasping over stubble and furrow. In a broad, almost level field on the lowest slope, an old ploughman stumbled behind his team: the horses were stiff and rusty; the plough mouldy and out of date; an urchin, small and elvish, the ploughman's grandson probably, held the bridle; the heavy clayey soil stuck so close and thick that the clumsy share had to be scraped with a hoe at either

furrow-end. A very ancient implement, and most unsteady ploughing; the lines of the old peasant's laboured poem did not run smoothly on the sheet of earth he scored: but the sun and the rain and the seasons will make it all right; the golden crop in the autumn will rustle as richly over the shaky scrawl of the worn-out hand as over the polished lines of the steam-plough.

In a belt of trees above the ill-ruled field a throstle sang a shrill prelude; weeks ago he thought the spring had come, the season was so mild. His pipe will be mellower later on. Down in the churchyard, in the early summer, the passenger (the churchyard here is a thoroughfare for pedestrians) may catch a tapping sound among the gravestones — the mavis cracking snails with savage glee! The snail is the mavis's oyster: and when he has lubricated his throat with a dozen or so, his notes become the purest and most spiritual to be heard in the grove.

Suddenly, the bells rang out from the church-tower. It was Saturday afternoon, and the ringers were practising. At the very first bob of the bells, a flight of starlings in a high swart clump of twisted boughs, resenting the artificial sound, sweet as it seemed in the distance, or prompted by the well known professional jealousy of the passerine order to emulate music so space-filling and important, broke out into a frenzied chattering, surged madly into the air, and swooped down upon the gardens of the sea-coast town. The Norman tower from which the ringing came stood out a reddish brown against the grey-green sea. Not a sail was visible. Like an enormous shelf of glossy, oily, well-planed slate, the long, broad water sloped up against the sky. A slab of dingy opal, greasy, with a pale emerald flame travelling over it transparently, the sea leant on the stony firmament as on a wall. Behind, the sinuous Downs, grey, green, and red — old land, budding crops, and fresh earth

— rocked and swayed with the motion of the world; and the Itinerant, falling into a trance, had a vision which delivered him from the spell of his own thought.

He beheld a young man, like a demi-god, build up alone, but with the help of many obsequious genii, a noble palace of porphyry roofed with gold. In the palace were many sumptuous suites of apartments which the demi-god, helped by his genii, furnished and adorned with all that was convenient and beautiful from the ends of the earth. In the palace also were lofty galleries dedicated to the various arts and sciences. When all was ready the demi-god married a beautiful goddess, who graciously condescended to share his palace of porphyry and gold; and they filled their house with their friends — gods, demi-gods, heroes, and men and women. Joyful children were born to them; and they spent their time happily in their family, in the enjoyment of friendship, in the study of all that might be known, and in the

pleasures of the arts. But the builder of the palace was dissatisfied. In a chamber at the top of his highest tower he brooded on the mystery of the universe. "What?" he said; and "Why?" He wrote many volumes answering these questions; but always at the end of each volume he found the questions starting up again. At last, when he was old, one night in his lonely chamber an invisible power seized him, led him through all his galleries, and through the offices of his palace, out by a little postern, where at his feet lay a deep pit, which he knew was dug for him. Before he stretched himself in it, all his thought and speculation rushed through his mind once more, and yearning to say some word that should be an answer to the question of the world, he cried aloud, lifting his face to heaven for the last time, "Live to Die!" At the very moment of his utterance and upward glance, there issued from an opposite postern, leading out of another palace of porphyry and gold which had been built

there at the same time as his own, an aged figure in every respect like himself. But the second demi-god, hearing the cry "Live to Die!" raised his voice, and, with a wrathful gesture, replied, as they fell into the pit together, "Die to Live!"

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